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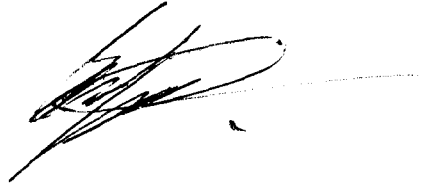
# **Diaspora and development? Nigerian organisations in London and their transnational linkages with ‘home’**

Benjamin Edward Norman Lampert

UCL

This thesis is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

I, Benjamin Edward Norman Lampert confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Benjamin Lampert', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Benjamin Edward Norman Lampert

20<sup>th</sup> February 2010

## **Abstract**

This thesis responds to the rapidly proliferating academic, civil society and policy discourses that posit diasporas as powerful and positive actors in the development of their 'homelands'. These discourses highlight diaspora organisations as key institutions through which international migrants and their descendants contribute to the progress of 'home'. Consequently, these organisations are being lauded as new development actors that should be engaged and supported by governments and international agencies interested in pursuing more direct and participatory modes of development assistance.

However, it has been argued that this celebration of diaspora organisations is based on limited knowledge. Drawing on extensive ethnographic fieldwork conducted with London-based Nigerian organisations and their sites of intervention in Nigeria, this thesis makes a contribution to better understanding diaspora organisations and their progressive potential for 'home'. The thesis argues that London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations are not necessarily involved in the development of 'home' to the extent, or in the ways, imagined in celebratory discourses of diaspora and development. These organisations are entwined in the politics of socio-economic status, gender and belonging at 'home' in ways that are profoundly ambivalent in terms of the progressive role expected of them. Furthermore, their monetary, material, intellectual and political contributions to development at 'home' appear relatively limited and rather marginal, especially when compared to those made by local actors. This can be traced to a number of factors that are widely seen to severely constrain collective transnational mobilisation and intervention. Nonetheless, the thesis argues that diaspora organisations have much to contribute to the development of 'home'. However, if states and international agencies are to engage and support diaspora organisations in fulfilling this progressive potential, it will be necessary to engage these groups in more genuine and meaningful dialogue through which alternative, more cosmopolitan visions of belonging and development can be articulated and pursued.



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## **Abstract**

This thesis responds to the rapidly proliferating academic, civil society and policy discourses that posit diasporas as powerful and positive actors in the development of their 'homelands'. These discourses highlight diaspora organisations as key institutions through which international migrants and their descendants contribute to the progress of 'home'. Consequently, these organisations are being lauded as new development actors that should be engaged and supported by governments and international agencies interested in pursuing more direct and participatory modes of development assistance.

However, it has been argued that this celebration of diaspora organisations is based on limited knowledge. Drawing on extensive ethnographic fieldwork conducted with London-based Nigerian organisations and their sites of intervention in Nigeria, this thesis makes a contribution to better understanding diaspora organisations and their progressive potential for 'home'. The thesis argues that London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations are not necessarily involved in the development of 'home' to the extent, or in the ways, imagined in celebratory discourses of diaspora and development. These organisations are entwined in the politics of socio-economic status, gender and belonging at 'home' in ways that are profoundly ambivalent in terms of the progressive role expected of them. Furthermore, their monetary, material, intellectual and political contributions to development at 'home' appear relatively limited and rather marginal, especially when compared to those made by local actors. This can be traced to a number of factors that are widely seen to severely constrain collective transnational mobilisation and intervention. Nonetheless, the thesis argues that diaspora organisations have much to contribute to the development of 'home'. However, if states and international agencies are to engage and support diaspora organisations in fulfilling this progressive potential, it will be necessary to engage these groups in more genuine and meaningful dialogue through which alternative, more cosmopolitan visions of belonging and development can be articulated and pursued.

## **List of Acronyms**

<b>AEF</b>	<b>Ayege Economic Forum</b>
<b>AFFORD</b>	<b>African Foundation for Development</b>
<b>ANPA</b>	<b>Association of Nigerian Physicians in the Americas</b>
<b>ANPU</b>	<b>Ayege National Progress Union</b>
<b>APC</b>	<b>Ayege Progress Committee</b>
<b>AV</b>	<b>Ayege Vanguard</b>
<b>BKET</b>	<b>Dr Bassey Kubianga Education Trust</b>
<b>BNLF</b>	<b>British Nigeria Law Forum</b>
<b>CANUK</b>	<b>Central Association of Nigerians in the UK</b>
<b>CBOs</b>	<b>Community-based organisations</b>
<b>CfD</b>	<b>Connections for Development</b>
<b>COMPAS</b>	<b>Centre on Migration, Policy and Society</b>
<b>CVS</b>	<b>Council for Voluntary Service</b>
<b>DFID</b>	<b>Department for International Development (United Kingdom)</b>
<b>DIFN</b>	<b>Development Impact for Nigeria</b>
<b>EFN</b>	<b>Engineering Forum of Nigerians</b>
<b>EU</b>	<b>European Union</b>
<b>FBO</b>	<b>Faith-based organisation</b>
<b>GCIM</b>	<b>Global Commission on International Migration</b>
<b>HCIDC</b>	<b>House of Commons International Development Committee</b>
<b>HDI</b>	<b>Human Development Initiatives</b>
<b>HEEC</b>	<b>Higher Education Engineering Challenge</b>
<b>HRW</b>	<b>Human Rights Watch</b>
<b>HTA</b>	<b>Hometown association</b>
<b>ICG</b>	<b>International Crisis Group</b>
<b>IDU</b>	<b>Ilu Development Union UK</b>
<b>ILF</b>	<b>Itsekiri Leaders' Forum</b>
<b>IME</b>	<b>Institution of Mechanical Engineers</b>

IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IWA	Itsekiri Women's Association
LEAD	Linkage with Experts and Academics in the Diaspora
LSACA	Lagos State AIDS Control Agency
MANSAG	Medical Association of Nigerian Specialists and General Practitioners in the British Isles
MBE	Member of the Order of the British Empire
MDCN	Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria
MFI	Micro-finance institution
MIDA	Migration for Development in Africa
MOSOP	Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People
NADECO	National Democratic Coalition
NBCF	Nigerian British Community Forum
NEADS	Nigerian Experts and Academics in the Diaspora Scheme
NEEDS	National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NIC	National Intelligence Council (United States)
NIDO	Nigerians in Diaspora Organisation
NIDOE	Nigerians in Diaspora Organisation Europe
NNCA	Nigerian Nurses Charitable Association
NNU	Nigeria National Union
NNVS	Nigerian National Volunteer Service
NWD	Nigerian Women for Development
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PCME	Program for Mexican Communities Abroad
RAPAC	Redeemed AIDS Programme Action Committee
SFH	Society for Family Health
TAFF	The African Families Foundation
UCPA	Ukpenwa Culture and Progress Association

UDU	Ukpenwa Development Union UK
UMS	Ukpenwa Masquerade Society
UN	United Nations
UPU	Urhobo Progress Union
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
UWA	Ukpenwa Women's Association UK
WNC	Warri National Council
WSU	Wazobia State Union

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# 1. Introduction

## At 'home': a river never runs so far as to forget its source

In a quiet, rural corner of Iroko State<sup>1</sup> in southwest Nigeria, some 15 kilometres down a narrow, anonymous side road off one of the main trade routes weaving its way inland from Lagos, lies the sleepy town of Ayege. Despite its isolated slumber relative to other more prominent Nigerian urban centres, Ayege is a distinctive and charmingly rustic town. It is surrounded by striking, myth-laden granite outcrops that once served its people as refuges in ancient wars but which are now enjoyed as retreats for weekend picnics. The centre of the town is dominated by the faded grandeur of the Brazilian architecture that became popular across southwest Nigeria in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries having been introduced by repatriated slaves who settled in Lagos. But Ayege is more than a town. It is one of the many ancestral kingdoms that trace their origins to Oduduwa, the mythical progenitor of the Yoruba people. Relative to other Yoruba ancestral kingdoms, Ayege may well be small and of limited profile and influence. Yet, with a population probably in the region of 100,000, the kingdom of Ayege covers an area of several hundred square kilometres and consists not only of a main town but also dozens of villages organised into over ten districts.

In taking you to this Yoruba kingdom, my purpose is to highlight an evening meeting of one of its many elite social clubs. I arrived half an hour late and yet I was still early. The host expressed his surprise that I still hadn't fully adjusted to "African time". Nonetheless, he warmly welcomed me into his living room where the meeting was due to take place. His wife brought me some water and sat down to talk with me. She enquired if I enjoyed being in Ayege and then moved on to discuss university life. She worked at one of Nigeria's oldest and most prestigious institutions, about an hour's drive from Ayege. The electricity was working and the last segment of the national TV news was reassuring its audience that the 2006 Nigerian census would be held as scheduled.

By now it was getting on for 10.30 in the evening and the meeting had been scheduled to start an hour and a half earlier. Suddenly there was a flush of arrivals, all citing a big

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<sup>1</sup> The names of some places, organisations and individuals have been changed to protect the identity of some respondents.

wedding in the community as the reason for their lateness. With about a dozen members present, it was decided to open the meeting. Following the established protocol, the participants rose to their feet, clutched their right hands to their chests and offered a stirring rendition of the Ayege National Anthem. The President of the association then announced a minute's silence for a fellow Omoyege (as 'indigenes' of Ayege are popularly known) who had been killed in a road accident in the town. Once respects had been paid, members took their seats and the business of the meeting got underway. Like the wife of the host, the President sought reassurance that I enjoyed my time in Ayege. I confirmed that I felt all too welcome and was still feeling the effects of palm wine. The president beamed that I was now an Omoyege and that my Ayege passport was in the post.

The real business of the meeting concerned a recent announcement by the Oba or 'King' of Ayege. His Majesty had declared at the annual Ayege Day celebration of 2005 that the kingdom's 'traditional authorities' (constituted by the Oba himself, his council of chiefs and its executive arm, the Ayege Progress Committee) intended to respond to the demands of the people by commencing a new 'headline project', the establishment of Ayege's very own polytechnic. Stating his wish that the project be completed within a year, the Oba had emphasised that it would be the latest in a long line of practical and prestigious 'self-help' initiatives coordinated by the 'traditional authorities' and would, as ever, rely on the 'communal effort' of the kingdom's 'citizens' and their associations.

For the Omoyeges whose meeting I was attending, the key issue was how best to respond to this request for assistance issued by their Oba. Should they levy themselves to make a collective financial contribution? Had anyone seen a feasible budget for the project? Would it be better to donate books, computers, and other equipment? Did any members know anyone who worked in the education sector or ministry who would be able to use their skills, experience, and/or influence to benefit the project? And why did the 'traditional authorities' want to build a polytechnic and not a full-blown university?

The questions and debates rumbled on until the oppressive heat and passing time began to take their toll. The meeting was soon closed and the members quickly livened up again once a feast of pounded yam, egusi soup, fried chicken, jollof rice, and Nigerian Guinness was served. While eating, much family and community news and humorous banter was exchanged and I fielded yet more enquires about my experiences of Ayege.

At nearly 1 o'clock in the morning, members began to decide that they should let their host have some peace. As we prepared to leave, one member asked me how I intended to get back to my lodgings. I replied that I was sure I would somehow find my way on public transport. "Eh, eh", he exclaimed, "this area is dangerous – you can't be wandering around on your own at this time of night! I will give you a lift in my car". As we walked out of the house together, we were both hit by the sharp chill of the night air. I was suddenly reminded that I was not in Ayege at all but much closer to home. Indeed, I was in my own ancestral homeland: southeast London.

The oppressive heat endured during the meeting had been generated not by a tropical evening but rather by a central heating system on full blast for the benefit of the host's wife who had yet to re-acclimatise to the British weather during her latest visit to the UK. The Nigerian national TV news was brought to us by BEN TV, an African diaspora channel established in London by a British-Nigerian. The feast had been supplied via the numerous Nigerian grocers on Deptford High Street. And the participants at the meeting were members of the Ayege National Progress Union, UK and Ireland Branch, less formally known as ANPU London.

### **Building the 'nation': discourses of diaspora and development and the celebration of collective transnational beneficence**

#### ***Building Ayege: local discourses of diaspora and development***

Through active membership of ANPU London, 'indigenes' of Ayege resident in the UK continue what has been an Omoyege tradition since the early 1900s of migrating beyond the kingdom, coming together for mutual support while 'abroad', and ultimately seeking to collectively contribute to the development of the ancestral homeland. The proximity of such a process to the core of the Omoyege identity constructed by the kingdom's 'traditional authorities' is revealed in the Ayege National Anthem. Imploring Omoyeges to 'love' their kingdom, the anthem centres around a solemn pledge to remember and benefit 'home' even if one should travel 'abroad'.

The Omoyege anthem is sung not only at the opening of meetings of ANPU branches around Nigeria and the wider world but also at the beginning of the annual Ayege Day festival. Held in the town every year since the Ayege Progress Committee (APC)

inaugurated it as a modern tradition in the late 1980s, the week-long series of events into which this carnival has evolved seeks to celebrate a distinct and proud Ayege identity in a concerted effort to strengthen the affective ties of Omoyeges to their ancestral kingdom. In an address to the 2005 festival, one 'patriotic' Omoyege eulogised Ayege's unique and vibrant heritage and declared that the kingdom is the "only country" to which her "sons and daughters" belong, no matter where in the world they might sojourn. Like the Ayege National Anthem, such attempts to heighten a sense of primary attachment to the kingdom also seek to oblige Omoyeges and their organisations to actively support its 'progress', especially if they are based 'abroad'. As the Oba counselled at Ayege Day 2005, Omoyeges "in the diaspora" should "understand the customs of their fatherland", "come home regularly", and "contribute to the development of the community".

Whether based in Nigeria or overseas, Omoyeges residing beyond the kingdom are a particular target of the propaganda of 'primary patriotism' (Geschiere and Gugler 1998) because a diasporic location is seen to afford greater opportunities for the accumulation of money, influential connections, and 'exposure', as access to new and useful knowledges and practices is popularly known. Consequently, Ayege Day is not only an occasion for diasporic Omoyeges to visit 'home' and reinvigorate their sense of ancestral identity. It is also an opportunity for them to discuss new ideas and political strategies with community leaders and, most importantly, to make individual and collective donations to the Ayege Development Fund administered by the APC for the 'progress' of the kingdom.

Indeed, the festival culminates when over 2000 Omoyeges and their guests don some of their finest 'traditional attires' and fill the town hall in the presence of the Oba, other senior members of the 'traditional authorities', and invited dignitaries for the Fundraising Grand Finale. Beyond appealing to Omoyege patriotism, this august occasion incentivises 'indigenes' to employ their financial, human, and political resources in the service of the ancestral homeland by offering reciprocal disbursements of status-augmenting symbolic capital, including honorary chieftaincy titles. Furthermore, the 'traditional authorities' make no secret during the celebration of their capacity to further reciprocate contributions to the communal resource-base, most notably by facilitating access to political and commercial opportunities in the kingdom.

‘Traditional authorities’ ‘ruling’ sub-national, geo-ethnic<sup>2</sup> homelands such as the kingdom of Ayege are not alone in attempting to construct diaspora as a source of money, connections, and ‘exposure’ that can be usefully employed in developing a ‘nation’. Nor do they represent the only form of government to have expectations of, and to create opportunities and incentives for, their citizens abroad to fulfil this promise and contribute individually and collectively to the upliftment of the ‘homeland’. While it may lag behind sub-national, geo-ethnic formations in so doing, the Federal Government of Nigeria has, in recent years, also attempted to reach out to its citizens abroad in an effort to engage them in its particular visions and practices of progress.

After 16 years of military rule, during which gross economic mismanagement and harsh repression had fuelled unprecedented levels of emigration, President Obasanjo was elected in 1999 as the leader of Nigeria’s fourth republic. Within a year and a half of entering office, Obasanjo embarked on what he termed the First Diaspora Dialogue. While in the United States for a UN conference in September 2000, President Obasanjo initiated this dialogue by addressing some 3,700 diasporic Nigerians gathered in Atlanta, Georgia. Opening the meeting, the President asserted:

[...H]ere and now, Nigeria is taking the bold first step to enable Nigerians living outside the country to participate fully in the process of visioning, planning and pursuing the political well-being, the economic development and the sound governance of their country.  
(Obasanjo 2000)

When President Obasanjo went on to stress the importance of human capital to the development process and to laud “great advances in communication technology”, it became clear what role he envisioned for the diaspora. “We can tap the knowledge and skills of many of our fellow Nigerians, wherever they are”, he contended. As for what he described as the “mechanics of the process”, the President proposed the formation of an “NGO” to “establish structures and networks that will promote the use of special skills of Nigerians in Diaspora”. Channelling expertise to the state, private sector, and

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<sup>2</sup> Borrowing from Bach (1997), the term ‘geo-ethnic’ is used to signify and encompass the diverse array of sub-national, ethno-spatial formations or ‘ancestral communities’ found in Nigeria, ranging in scale from the likes of the ‘village’, ‘hometown’, ‘kingdom’, and ‘clan’ to wider formations such as the ‘tribe’ and ‘ethnic nationality’.

international agencies working in Nigeria, participation in this NGO would involve “reimbursable service with the promise of a handsome return”.

With the provision of some state funding to enable “take-off”, Obasanjo’s vision was realised with the creation of Nigerians in Diaspora Organisation (NIDO). Established first in North America in late 2001 and then in Europe a year later, NIDO has since inaugurated chapters in several African, Asian, and Australasian countries. To facilitate the proposed contribution of NIDO and other diasporic professional groups to the Nigerian project, President Obasanjo created an agency within the office of the presidency to act as an enabling intermediary between the diaspora and the apparatus of the state. The Nigerian National Volunteer Service (NNVS) came into operation in 2004 and the following year instigated with the support of the Federal Ministry of Science and Technology its first major programme; a now annual conference in Abuja bringing diasporic scientists, medics, and technology experts together with some of their professional counterparts based in Nigeria. Further channels for the transfer of diasporic knowledge and expertise have been opened-up, including opportunities for suitably qualified diasporans to take one to six month secondments in Nigerian universities and to give transnational counsel to government advisory committees. Some diasporans have even been offered permanent positions in government ministries and agencies.

Furthermore, the Nigerian state has sought more than the transnational transfer of human capital alone. Institutions and schemes through which diasporans can make financial investments in Nigeria have been promoted, such as the Nigerian Stock Exchange and the King’s Town property development in Abuja. NIDO and Nigerian professional organisations around the world have also been encouraged to advocate on behalf of Nigeria, particularly by lobbying in support of its debt relief campaign, by contesting its negative portrayal in the global media, and by utilising business contacts to encourage foreign investment.

### ***Building ‘nations’: globalising discourses of diaspora and development***

Clearly, both the Nigerian state and the ‘traditional authorities’ of sub-national, geo-ethnic formations such as the kingdom of Ayege attempt to construct diaspora as a source of money, connections and ‘exposure’ that can be usefully employed in the development of the ‘homeland’. Both forms of government therefore expect, and create

opportunities and incentives for, their overseas citizens to individually and collectively channel 'home' flows of financial, human, social, and political capital. In so doing, these local and national attempts to construct and engage the support of transnationalised communities of belonging intersect with new, globalising discourses of 'diaspora and development'.

Proliferating through a host of recent academic, policy, and civil society publications and the nascent initiatives of international agencies, these emergent discourses reinvigorate and re-orientate established debates surrounding the relationship between international migration and development (AFFORD 2000; Van Hear and Sørensen 2003a; HCIDC 2004; IOM 2004a,b; USAID 2004; GCIM 2005; Farrant et al 2006; Ionescu 2006; UN 2006; World Bank 2006; Davies 2007; DFID 2007; Merz et al 2007; Styan 2007; Bakewell 2008a; Faist 2008; Skeldon 2008). Positing migrants less as a drain of the brains of their countries of origin and more as powerful agents in the development of 'home', these discourses emphasise the substantial and growing volume of household remittances and reinterpret their impact more positively (Van Hear 2002; Black 2003; Gammeltoft 2003, Newland 2003, 2007; Pieke et al 2007; de Haas 2009). Furthermore, by widening the conventional debate to include notions of diaspora and migrant transnationalism, attention has been drawn to a multitude of alternative border-spanning linkages, networks, and flows through which overseas nationals can produce beneficial economic, social, cultural and political effects at 'home' (Al-Ali and Koser 2002; Vertovec 2003; COMPAS 2004a; Newland with Patrick 2004; Portes et al 2007; Portes 2009).

In these expanded debates, diaspora organisations have been identified and celebrated as key transnational infrastructures for inciting such positive change at 'home'. Analytical attention has concentrated heavily on hometown associations and their channelling of 'collective remittances' to public services, infrastructure and micro-credit schemes in 'home' communities (Levitt 1998; Portes and Landolt 2000; Vertovec 2003; USAID 2004; Babcock 2006; Mohan 2006, 2008; Orozco and Rouse 2007; Styan 2007; Fox and Bada 2008; Mercer et al 2008, 2009; Mazzucato and Kabki 2009). Diaspora organisations have also been cited as prominent actors in 'political transnationalism', utilising the strategic space of diaspora to lobby and gain the support of both 'host' and 'home' governments on issues they believe to be of particular relevance to the progress of their communities and countries of origin (Danese 1998; Itzigsohn 2000; Kerlin



2000; Newland and Patrick 2004; Orozco and Welle 2004; Cordero-Guzmán 2005; Cano and Délano 2007; Dumont 2008; Fox and Bada 2008; Itzigsohn and Villacrés 2008; Kleist 2008; McGregor 2009). Furthermore, by engaging local and national institutions at 'home', it has been argued that diaspora organisations can be a major channel for 'social remittances' - the transfer from 'host' to 'home' contexts of progressive knowledges, ideas, values, norms and behaviours (Levitt 1998; Van Hear and Sørensen 2003b; Vertovec 2003; USAID 2004; Taylor et al 2006; UN 2006; Newland 2007; Portes 2009). Such remittances are seen to produce positive socio-cultural and political changes at 'home' including the development of decision-making, organisational and management skills, the promotion of gender equality, and, as President Obasanjo appeared to hope above in the case of Nigeria, the entrenchment of liberal, democratic institutions and governance (ibid.).

### **Building the 'nation'? Questioning discourses of diaspora and development**

In a number of ways then, diaspora organisations are being constructed and celebrated globally as having much potential for effecting positive change at 'home'. Consequently, they are being lauded as entities that should be supported by international agencies interested in pursuing more direct and participatory modes of development assistance (Levitt 1997, 1998; AFFORD 1998, 2000; Danese 1998; Kerlin 2000; Orozco 2003, 2004; Vertovec 2003; Newland with Patrick 2004; HCIDC 2004; Orozco with Lapointe 2004; USAID 2004; GCIM 2005; Ionescu 2006; UN 2006; Davies 2007; DFID 2007; Hernandez-Coss and Bun 2007; Orozco and Rouse 2007; Styan 2007; Mercer et al 2008; Østergaard-Nielsen 2009; Mazzucato and Kabki 2009). However, it has also been argued that such celebrations are based on limited knowledge. For example, a 2004 report claims of diaspora organisations, "their structure, strategies and influences on local and national development are only minimally understood" (COMPAS 2004a). Indeed, where diaspora organisations and their border-spanning activities are addressed it tends to be within wider studies of migrant transnationalism in which they do not constitute the specific focus of research (Portes and Landolt 2000; Vertovec 2003; Newland with Patrick 2004; USAID 2004). Furthermore, as Al-Ali and Koser (2002) note, this literature concentrates largely on the particular context of Latin American and Caribbean migration to the US.

In contrast, this thesis is grounded in the context of African, specifically Nigerian, migration to the UK and employs a substantive focus on diaspora organisations. Indeed, seeking to engage critically with globalising discourses of diaspora and development, this thesis is centrally concerned with the role of London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations in the development of 'home'. In exploring this role, the thesis argues that London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations are not necessarily involved in the development of home to the extent, or in the ways, imagined in globalising discourses of diaspora and development. This has, the thesis contends, important implications for the growing tendency to celebrate and engage diaspora organisations as channels for more direct and participatory modes of international development assistance. However, far from dismissing these groups as transnational agents of progress and as potential development partners, the thesis asserts that diaspora organisations are widely seen by diasporans and, most importantly, their potential beneficiaries in Nigeria as having much to contribute to 'home'. If this progressive potential is to be engaged and supported, it is argued, the onus is on governments and international agencies to develop more cosmopolitan visions of progress that take account of the alternative ways in which development might be conceived and practiced both in diaspora and at 'home'.

The thesis is divided into five parts, each consisting of two chapters. Part 1 sets the context for the main argument, charting in more detail in Chapter 2 the emergence, proliferation, and key claims of globalising discourses of diaspora and development and setting out in Chapter 3 the research design, methods, and data on which the thesis is based. In particular, Chapter 3 describes how 367 London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations were identified and engaged in a scoping study with five being selected as case-studies for more detailed ethnographic research, including at their sites of intervention in Nigeria. Part 2 opens the empirical analysis, tracing in Chapters 4 and 5 how London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations relate to development at 'home' in ways that could be considered rather problematic in terms of the progressive role expected of them in globalising discourses of diaspora and development. More specifically, these two chapters focus on how the identified diaspora organisations are embedded in some of the key power relations through which development can be seen to unfold, asserting that these groups are implicated in the politics of socio-economic status, gender, and belonging in ways that are much more ambivalent than globalising discourses of diaspora and development might hope. However, these chapters emphasise that this is not a reason to overlook the development potential of diaspora

organisations, especially when their transnational visions and practices are often considered progressive both in diaspora and at 'home'.

In Part 3, the empirical analysis moves on to consider the extent to which London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations are seen to contribute to development at 'home'. In particular, Chapter 6 examines the magnitude and impacts of the 'collective remittances' and 'political transnationalism' effected by the organisations in question and Chapter 7 focuses on the degree to which these groups transfer 'home' 'social remittances'. Together, these chapters conclude that while London-based diaspora organisations are often seen to contribute to development at 'home', they are not seen to do so to the extent that globalising discourses of diaspora and development might imagine. Indeed, it is argued that far from driving 'progress' at 'home', these groups are seen to make a relatively limited and ultimately rather marginal contribution to local and national development in Nigeria. Furthermore, attention is drawn to the much greater importance and potential of local agency and expertise in processes of development at 'home', arguing that these should not be overlooked and elided in the apparent rush to celebrate and support the contributions of overseas diasporas.

Attending to the limited role of London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations in the development of 'home', Part 4 explores the factors that are seen to constrain the desire and ability of these groups to operate and intervene transnationally. Chapter 8 identifies an often severe lack of funds and limited levels of participation as the factors most readily cited as the major constraints on collective transnational contribution. It is shown that these limitations are in turn traced by respondents to the challenges diasporans are seen to face in settling and progressing in the 'host' society and their apparent development of a more individualistic and self-indulgent disposition. It is therefore suggested that the desire and ability of diasporans to contribute to 'home' are not necessarily as great as is often implicitly assumed in celebratory discourses of diaspora and development and that any policy interventions designed to heighten the transnational capabilities of diasporans should make a priority of facilitating their 'integration' and 'inclusion' in the 'host' society. Building on this, Chapter 9 details how collective transnational intervention is seen to be constrained further by a distinct lack of transnational trust, producing what appears to verge on a culture of mistrust not only within the diaspora but also between the diaspora and 'home'. With financial fraud and clientalism seen to be rife in Nigerian society, the prevailing suspicion is that

diaspora organisations are little more than vehicles for the personal enrichment and political gain of those who form and run them, discouraging many diasporans from supporting these groups. Furthermore, organised diasporans themselves are extremely wary of trusting local intermediaries at 'home', fearing that the latter will misappropriate any transnational contributions that are channelled through them. Intervening transnationally is seen to be made even more difficult by the lack of an 'enabling environment' at 'home'. Indeed, unreliable telecommunications and transport infrastructure, a lack of security, poor science and technology facilities, a culture of unprofessionalism, an unstable, corrupt, and authoritarian state, and suspicion and resistance from the local to the national level are widely seen to make 'home' a hostile rather than enabling environment for collective transnational intervention. Consequently, it is argued that development is as much a prerequisite as an outcome of collective transnational contribution and that discourses of diaspora and development should not serve to divert attention and resources away from attending directly to the fundamental development needs of 'home'.

As the final section of the thesis, Part 5 continues and concludes the empirical analysis. Chapter 10 contends that London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations should not be seen simply as agents of collective transnational intervention at 'home'. There is much more to diasporic associational life and very often the most immediate imperative bringing diasporans together is a desire to belong and develop in diaspora. Indeed, for many diasporans, their organisations are primarily arenas for emotional, practical, and professional support, cultural solidarity and expression, and, often most important of all, friendship, relaxation and enjoyment. Therefore, it is argued that a desire to belong and develop in diaspora is fundamental to forging, driving, binding, and sustaining diaspora organisations and making them in anyway capable of contributing to 'home'. As such, it is asserted that activities undertaken by diaspora organisations to fulfil this diasporic desire need to be recognised and supported in any policy intervention that seeks to heighten the contribution of these groups to 'home'. Building on this theme, Chapter 11, the conclusion to the thesis, reviews the proceeding chapters and contends that what is also key in bringing diasporans together to create and maintain organisations is a desire to belong and develop at 'home'. It is shown that organised diasporans often see their participation in diasporic associational life and collective transnational intervention as enabling them to be remembered and recognised, and even to be offered status, positions, and opportunities, back at 'home'. All of this is considered essential to

fulfilling what is overwhelming seen as the ultimate diasporic desire: to establish a 'home' back at 'home', a place in which one can belong and be respected, fulfilled, 'comfortable', and happy, a place to which one can return with greater frequency and duration and one day perhaps even permanently. Globalising discourses of diaspora and development need to recognise this desire in order to better understand what the development of 'home' means to those most deeply invested in its realisation.

***Part 1: constructing and questioning collective  
transnational power***

## **2. Constructing collective transnational power: diaspora and the development of 'home'**

### **Introduction**

This chapter traces the rise of globalising discourses of diaspora and development and their celebration of diaspora organisations as powerful and positive actors in the progress of 'home'. Setting the proliferation of these discourses in the wider context of growing academic interest in diaspora in general and 'new African diasporas' in particular, I show how they have reinvigorated, expanded and radically re-orientated conventional debates on the role of international migration in the development of communities and countries of origin. Recognising and reinterpreting household remittances and emphasising the multiple border-spanning ties involved in 'migrant transnationalism', these discourses posit migrants and their descendents not as a drain of the brains of their countries of origin but rather as important contributors to the development of 'home'. Constructing a central role for diaspora organisations in this process, discourses of diaspora and development have come to laud these groups as entities that should be engaged and supported by international agencies interested in pursuing more direct and participatory modes of development assistance. However, I argue that such celebrations are based on limited knowledge and suggest that there is a need for much more substantive research on collective transnational intervention that embraces different diasporic contexts, more diverse organisational forms, and a stronger empirical engagement with sites of contribution at 'home'.

### **'New African diasporas' and transnational linkages with 'home'**

Over the last twenty years, there has been a burgeoning academic interest in the notion of 'diaspora' as signalled by the launching of a journal by that name in 1991 and a proliferation of influential works (see for example Hall 1990; Safran 1991; Clifford 1994; Brah 1996; Lavie and Swedenburg 1996; Cohen 1997; Vertovec and Cohen 1999; Braziel and Mannur 2003). Reflecting this wider trend, the literature on the 'African diaspora' has also experienced a substantial expansion (see for example: Bonnett and Llewellyn Watson 1990; Gilroy 1993; Harris 1993; Conniff 1994; Segal 1995, 1998; Gordon 1998; Jalloh et al 1997; Okpewho et al 1999). Yet, as a number of critiques

have noted, this expanded literature on the 'African diaspora' has focussed overwhelmingly on the historical dispersal of Africans as a result of the Atlantic slave trade (Akyeampong 2000; Byfield 2000; Mohan and Zack-Williams 2002; Koser 2003a; ter Haar 2004; Zeleza 2005; Manger and Assal 2006). It is argued that this "preoccupation with slavery and its descendants has diverted our attention from striking new patterns and processes associated with recent [African] migrations" (Koser 2003a: 3).

Consequently, Koser (2003a: 3) argues that "a significant empirical research gap" surrounds the 'new African diasporas' which have been produced by substantial postcolonial movements out of Africa, often in response to a contemporary climate of economic hardship, political oppression, social instability, armed conflict and environmental crises (Peil 1995; Akyeampong 2000; Mohan and Zack-Williams 2002; Ajibewa and Akinrinade 2003; Styan 2007; Grillo and Mazzucato 2008)<sup>1</sup>. While the considerable size and dramatic growth of these 'new' diasporas has begun to attract detailed academic inquiry in some contexts<sup>2</sup>, their presence in the UK has received relatively little attention (Daley 1998). Attempting to rectify this would seem pertinent given that the 2001 UK Census shows that the 'Black African' population has grown faster than any other ethnic group since 1991, more than doubling in size to nearly half a million.

Furthermore, despite Nigerians being "almost certainly the largest single national group amongst Africans living in Europe and North America" (Black et al 2004: 23), scant consideration has been given to the 'new' global diasporas they have created<sup>3</sup>, which may include between 2 and 5 million people (COMPAS 2004b; de Haas 2006; Hernandez-Coss and Bun 2007). Consequently, there is very little work on Nigerians based in the UK<sup>4</sup> even though they constitute the largest national cohort of African-born

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<sup>1</sup> Although focussing on migration within the continent, insightful accounts of emigration dynamics in Africa are provided by Adekanye (1998), Adepoju (1994; 1995; 1998a,b), Afolayan (1998), Agozino (1995), Baker and Aina (1995), Milazi (1998), and Nnoli (1998).

<sup>2</sup> Notable studies include Owusu (1998; 1999; 2000; 2006), ter Haar (1998), McGown (1999), Arthur (2000), Diouf (2000), MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga (2000), Al-Ali et al (2001a,b), Riccio (2001; 2003), Reynolds (2002; 2004; 2006; 2009), Stoller (2002; 2003), Koser (2003b), D'Alisera (2004); Mohan (2006; 2008); Konadu-Agyemang et al (2006); Kothari (2008); Mazzucato (2008); McGregor (2008; 2009), Mercer et al (2008; 2009); Mazzucato and Kabki (2009).

<sup>3</sup> There is, however, an emergent body of work on the trafficking of Nigerian women for prostitution in Europe (van Dijk 2001; Aghatise 2002; Elabor-Idemudia 2002; Imoukhuede 2002; UTOPIA 2002; Tesunbi 2003; Ifekwunigwe 2004; Carling 2005).

<sup>4</sup> The only identified published academic works focussing substantively on 'new' Nigerian diasporas in the UK are Jerrome (1974; 1978; 1979) on 'Ibos in London', Oyètádé's overview of 'the Yorùbá



'Black Africans' in England and Wales, numbering 86,958 according to the 2001 Census, an increase of 88% over the preceding decade. Moreover, this Census figure is undoubtedly a considerable underestimate of the Nigerian diaspora in the UK as it does not include undocumented migrants and UK citizens of Nigerian descent (*ibid.*; IOM 2007). Indeed, while there are no definitive data, the 2006 Labour Force Survey estimates that there were 140,000 Nigeria-born residents in the UK that year (Change Institute 2009) and de Haas (2006) references diplomatic sources that estimate the UK-based Nigerian diaspora to be as large as 1 million. Illustrating just how unreliable the data are, the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office offers an especially broad and undoubtedly rather excessive estimate, stating, "There is a large Nigerian community in the UK, estimated at between 800,000 and 3 million"<sup>5</sup>. There is, however, something of a consensus that UK-based Nigerians are heavily concentrated in London (COMPAS 2004b; Hernandez-Coss and Bun 2007; Change Institute 2009; de Haas 2009), the 2001 Census, for example, recording that nearly 80% of the Nigeria-born 'Black African' population lives in Greater London.

While the data are unreliable, it is clear that there is a substantial Nigerian population in the UK, particularly in London. The lack of research on this population is all the more surprising given that Nigerians have been migrating in some numbers to the UK since the late colonial period. The early cohorts were dominated by students, often funded by government scholarships or the benevolence of their 'town unions' back in Nigeria (Achebe 1960; Jerrome 1978; Oyètádé 1993; Uduku 2002). These flows peaked towards the end of the 1950s as Nigeria prepared for its independence from Britain, which was achieved in 1960 (Jerrome 1978). In 1958, there were as many as 4,000 Nigerian students in the UK (Oyètádé 1993) and they had already begun to establish a rich associational life, creating the first Nigerian 'ethnic', 'hometown', 'national' and 'professional' organisations in the UK (Sklar 1963; Uduku 2002). The vast majority of the graduates produced at this time returned to Nigeria upon the completion of their studies to take-up important government and civil service positions. However, a few graduates and some of those who failed to complete their studies stayed on in the UK (Jerrome 1978; Oyètádé 1993), as did small communities of merchant seamen from

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community in London' and Hunt and Lightly (2001), Harris (2006) and Burgess (2009) on UK-based Nigerian churches. Uduku (2002) provides an historical account of the Igbo diaspora within and beyond Nigeria in which she touches on its presence in the UK.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/country-profile/sub-saharan-africa/nigeria/?profile=intRelations>

south-eastern Nigeria who had settled in port cities such as Liverpool and Cardiff (Uduku 2002).

In the post-colonial period, new flows of Nigerian students continued to arrive, many now funded by the independent Nigerian state and most still returning to important positions at 'home' (Jerrome 1978). However, the outbreak of war between Nigeria and the secessionist Igbo state of Biafra between 1966 and 1970 saw a good number of Nigerian graduates, especially those of Igbo ancestry, delay their return 'home' and start to establish a more permanent life in the UK (ibid.). While this conflict also brought some refugees to settle in the UK, the Nigerian population in the country did not start to grow notably until Nigeria's oil-dependent economy descended rapidly into severe crisis in the early 1980s (Oyètádé 1993; Uduku 2002; COMPAS 2004b; de Haas 2006; Change Institute 2009). With opportunities declining in Nigeria and corrupt and repressive military government tightening its grip on power, students who were already in the UK remained to seek work and, more significantly, were joined by an increasing number of their fellow nationals whose primary motives were more political and economic than educational (ibid.). With political and economic crisis having become entrenched in Nigeria, despite the return of democracy in 1999, many Nigerians have continued to migrate and settle overseas. It is primarily in this context that we have witnessed the emergence of what might be called the contemporary Nigerian 'diaspora'.

Ascribing the term 'diaspora' to the dispersions of people produced by recent migrations has become common academic practice. Koser (2003a: 5) argues that the term "seems to apply to virtually any population that originates in a land other than that in which it resides" (see also Vertovec and Cohen 1999 and Brubaker 2005). Similarly, Raman (2003) writes of "diasporic promiscuity" whereby "diaspora is everywhere, and nearly everyone, it seems, is suddenly diasporic in some sense". Indeed, Vertovec and Cohen (1999) note that, during the period 1991-1998, authors in the journal *Diaspora* had used the expression to describe 38 different groups. As Clifford argued as far back as 1994 (311), "Diasporic language appears to be replacing, or at least supplementing, minority discourse".

Such increasingly routine deployment of 'diaspora' has raised fears that "the continuing potency of the term is threatened by its misuse as a loose reference" (Vertovec and Cohen 1999: xvii; Raman 2003; Brubaker 2005). In response, attempts have been made

to discipline the concept by producing classificatory frameworks. These generally draw on and reassert the seminal work of Safran (1991) and Cohen (1997), both of whom highlight six defining diasporic characteristics: 1) a history of dispersal from an original 'homeland', 2) the maintenance of a collective myth or memory about the 'homeland', 3) a troubled relationship with the host society, suggesting a lack of full acceptance by the host, 4) a desire to return to the 'homeland', 5) a collective commitment to the maintenance or restoration of the 'homeland', 6) a collective identity and a sense of empathy and solidarity importantly defined by a continuing relationship with the 'homeland'.

Despite this compatibility between the two models, a key difference emerges from Safran's (1991) attempt to reassert the Jewish experience of expulsion from Babylon as the defining reference point for diasporic authenticity. This positioning of the 'Jewish diaspora' as the "ideal type" (ibid: 84) can be interpreted as an attempt to reaffirm the association of diaspora with "oppression, forced displacement and the ceaseless search for an authentic homeland" as also reflected in its application to the dispersal of Africans by the Atlantic slave trade (Mohan and Zack-Williams 2002: 216; Vertovec and Cohen 1999). Cohen (1997), along with Clifford (1994), questions Safran's (1991) idealisation of the 'Jewish diaspora' by emphasising its heterogeneity and arguing that significant elements of Jewish historical experience do not meet his criteria of a strong attachment to a homeland and a desire to return there.

Furthermore, Cohen (1997) asserts that dispersals of people displaying the traits described in Safran's (1991) typology are not just the result of forced displacements but also occur from more voluntary and proactive movements such as those involved in colonisation, trade and labour migration. This argument has gained wide currency (Hannerz 1998; Vertovec and Cohen 1999; Mohan and Zack-Williams 2002; Koser 2003a) and has been empirically supported in the context of 'new African diasporas' by studies of labour migrants from Ghana (Owusu 1998, 1999, 2000; Manuh 2003) and migrant traders from Senegal (Diouf 2000; Riccio 2001, 2003) and West Africa in general (Stoller 2002, 2003).

In moving away from positing a history of forced displacement as a necessary condition for defining 'diaspora', and in attempting to legitimate their use of the term to describe migrant groups, authors have emphasised its increasing utilisation as a label of self-

identification (Koser 2003a). As Clifford (1994: 310) states, “The language of diaspora is increasingly invoked by displaced peoples who feel (maintain, revive, invent) a connection with a prior home” (see also Raman 2003). Significantly, Koser (2003a: 6) notes that “the description of ‘diaspora’ is gaining currency within a number of African communities themselves”. This is evidenced in the discourses of a number of London-based African-led NGOs (for example: AFFORD 1998, 2000; TAFF 2002; [www.africarecruit.com](http://www.africarecruit.com); [www.diaspora.org.uk](http://www.diaspora.org.uk)) and, as we will see, ‘diaspora’ is often invoked by Nigerians both in London and at ‘home’.

Beyond its deployment as a term of self-identification, a further characteristic of ‘diaspora’ that is increasingly stressed is the existence of ties with the ‘homeland’ (Safran 1991; Cohen 1997; Hannerz 1998; Vertovec and Cohen 1999; Mohan and Zack-Williams 2002). The critical importance attached to this characteristic in contemporary definitions of diaspora is illustrated by Sheffer (1986: 3): “Modern diasporas are ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin – their homelands”. In Akyeampong’s (2000) analysis, it is the maintenance of such links that makes contemporary forms of African diaspora distinct. He identifies a transition from “a diaspora with little contact with the point of origin...to one that maintains active contact with the mother continent; all culminating in the birth of a unique African who straddles continents, worlds and cultures” (ibid: 183).

This argument reflects strongly the central assertion of the substantial body of literature on ‘migrant transnationalism’. Burgeoning from the late 1980s onwards, this work contends that major advances in, and wider access to, global telecommunication and travel enables international migrants and their descendants to forge and sustain with novel and increasing intensity border-spanning social, economic, political and cultural linkages between places of settlement and origin (Glick Schiller et al 1992; Basch et al 1994; Portes 1997, 1999, 2001; Smith and Guarnizo 1998; Portes et al 1999; Roberts et al 1999; Vertovec and Cohen 1999; Vertovec 1999, 2001; Levitt 2001). While this literature has focussed largely on labour migration from Latin America and the Caribbean to the US (Al-Ali and Koser 2002; Smith 2002; Caglar 2006), it has produced a shift in the way that international migration in general is conceived.

Working against the traditional tendency to view migrant incorporation as a process of 'assimilation' in the 'host' through which ties with places of origin are severed, the notion of migrant transnationalism affords far greater recognition to the ways in which migrants can live 'dual lives', deeply and simultaneously embedded in both sending and receiving contexts (Rouse 1991; Portes 1997; Hannerz 1998; Levitt 1998; Grillo et al 2000; Riccio 2001; Newland 2003; Sørensen et al 2003a). This transnational living, and the circular flows of people, money, commodities, information, and ideas that it involves, relies on the existence of border-spanning social networks, of which migrant or diaspora organisations have been identified as a key element (see for example: Okamura 1983; Gitmez and Wilpert 1987; Boyd 1989; Fawcett 1989; Gurak and Caces 1992; Levitt 1997, 1998; Goldring 1998; Landolt et al 1999; Popkin 1999; Portes 1999; Roberts et al 1999; Orozco 2000, 2003, 2004; Riccio 2001, 2003; COMPAS 2004a,b; Orozco with Lapointe 2004; Orozco and Welle 2004; Caglar 2006; Orozco and Rouse 2007; Faist 2008; Portes et al 2007; Kleist 2008; Mazzucato 2008; Mercer et al 2008; Mazzucato and Kabki 2009).

### **Diaspora organisations and migrant transnationalism**

As an important mode of transnational practice, migrant organisations are critical to the construction of diaspora. As Oussatcheva (2001: 7) asserts:

[...]Institutions are the core of a diaspora community. It is via institutions that a diaspora discourse, which creates the image of community, diasporan culture and consciousness, is produced and disseminated. [...]Institutions uphold different kinds of practices in which individuals can express and enhance their identification with a community. [...]The stability of this existence is achieved through the institutionalization of Diaspora [...].

The quintessential manifestation of this diasporic process is the formation of migrant voluntary associations. These can take a wide variety of forms, although it would seem that all are grounded in some kind of shared identity, very often relating to a common place of origin such as a nation-state, region, town, or village (Minghuan 1998; Vertovec 2001; Ndofo-Tah 2000; Orozco 2000, 2003, 2004; Owusu 2000; Orozco with Lapointe 2004; Orozco and Welle 2004; Moya 2005; Mohan 2006, 2008; Orozco and Rouse 2007; Page 2007; Portes et al 2007; Styan 2007; Fox and Bada 2008; Mercer et al 2008; Mazzucato and Kabki 2009; Portes 2009). Indeed, a number of authors, each

concerned with a different migration context, claim that a common 'hometown' is the most prevalent basis for association (Jerrome 1978; Okamura 1983; AFFORD 1998; Zabin and Rabadan 1998; Guarnizo et al 1999; Landolt et al 1999; Owusu 2000; Vertovec 2003). For example, Okamura (1983) records that 50% of Filipino organisations in Hawaii are 'hometown associations' (HTAs), while Adeyanju (2000) finds that 80% of Nigerian organisations in Toronto are HTAs.

In many instances bound up with a common place of origin, extended kinship and ethnicity (including dialect) are other key forms of identity seen to underlay associations (e.g. Rex 1991; AFFORD 1998; Minghuan 1998; Ndofor-Tah 2000; Owusu 2000; Reynolds 2002, 2009; Mercer et al 2008). Also mentioned, but given far less attention, are associations rooted in differences within these broader identity signifiers. These differences within migrant groups from the same place or of shared ethnicity delimit numerous "communities of interest" (AFFORD 1998: 17) including associations for women, youth, the elderly, workers, tenants, parents, alumni, businesspeople, sportspeople, war veterans, members of distinct professions, followers of different religions, and supporters of particular political parties (Schoeneberg 1985; Basch 1987; Joly 1987; Rex and Josephides 1987; Cheetham 1988; Peil 1995; Liu 1998; Ndofor-Tah 2000; Styan 2007; Mercer et al 2008; Portes 2009).

The practice of international migrants forming voluntary associations has a considerable history (Jenkins 1988a; see also Moya 2005 for an extensive historiography). For example, Basch (1987: 160) claims that "[s]uch associations historically have been a prominent feature of the sociocultural landscape of New York", particularly since the arrival of Italian, Irish, and Jewish immigrants in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Similarly, Liu (1998: 582) argues that "[t]ogether with Chinese schools and newspapers, voluntary associations [...] have long been regarded as one of the 'three pillars' of Overseas Chinese societies". Furthermore, migrant associations have been formed by people originating from a wide range of countries<sup>6</sup>. And in the context of increasing

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<sup>6</sup> For example, Belize (Babcock 2006), Cameroon (Ndofor-Tah 2000; Page 2007; Mercer et al 2008, 2009), China (Liu 1998; Minghuan 1998), Columbia (Sassen-Koob 1979; Guarnizo et al 1999), Cyprus (Josephides 1987), Dominican Republic (Sassen-Koob 1979; Georges 1988; Levitt 1997), El Salvador (Landolt et al 1999; Itzigsohn and Villacrés 2008), Ghana (Attah-Poku 1996; Owusu 2000, 2006; Henry and Mohan 2003; Mohan 2006, 2008; Mazzucato 2008; Mazzucato and Kabki 2009), Guatemala (Popkin 1999), Guinea-Bissau (Kerlin 2000), Guyana (Orozco 2004), Haiti (Glick Schiller and Fouron 1998), Mexico (Goldring 1998; Zabin and Rabadan 1998; Roberts et al 1999; Orozco with Lapointe 2004; Cano and Délano 2007; Fox and Bada 2008), Morocco (Danese 1998; Dumont 2008; Østergaard-Nielsen 2009), Nigeria (Jerrome 1978; Oyètádé 1993; Adeyanju 2000; Uduku 2000, 2002; Reynolds 2002, 2009;

global mobility, the formation of migrant associations appears to be a practice that is becoming increasingly common, with a large proportion of the literature contending that these organisations, particularly in the form of HTAs, are growing both in size and number (Okamura 1983; Basch 1987; Jenkins 1988a; Goldring 1998; Attah-Poku 1996; Levitt 1997; AFFORD 1998; Minghuan 1998; Landolt et al 1999; Roberts et al 1999; Adeyanju 2000; Kerlin 2000; Vertovec 2003; USAID 2004; Caglar 2006). For instance, Minghuan (1998) estimates that the number of Chinese migrant associations around the world has almost doubled to 9,000 between 1950 and 1991 and Vertovec (2003) claims that the number of Mexican migrant associations in Chicago alone has increased from 35 in 1995 to 181 in 2002.

As such growth suggests, international migrant associations perform important functions for their members. Traditionally, the literature has focussed overwhelmingly on functions oriented to the economic, social, cultural, and political needs of migrants in the 'host' environment such as assisting initial adaptation, performing a long-term socio-economic support function, and representing members' interests to the 'host' society and state (Rex 1973; Sassen-Koob 1979; Schoeneberg 1985; Basch 1987; Rex et al 1987; Jenkins 1988b). More recently, however, the growing literature on 'migrant transnationalism' has placed far greater emphasis on border-spanning associational functions which sustain economic, social, cultural, and political relations with places of origin (Basch 1987; Attah-Poku 1996; Levitt 1997; AFFORD 1998; Danese 1998; Goldring 1998; Landolt et al 1999; Popkin 1999; Roberts et al 1999; Adeyanju 2000; Itzigsohn 2000; Kerlin 2000; Owusu 2000; Riccio 2001; Henry and Mohan 2003; Vertovec 2003; USAID 2004; Babcock 2006; Portes et al 2007; Fox and Bada 2008; Mazzucato 2008; Mazzucato and Kabki 2009; Østergaard-Nielsen 2009).

Migrant associations are therefore seen to have a "dual orientation to both the homeland and the country of residence" (Schoeneberg 1985: 417). Indeed, Basch (1987: 163) asserts that these organisations "link [...] immigrants to both the home and host societies simultaneously and in so doing join the two societies in a single field of action". From this perspective, the proliferation of international migrant associations can be seen as an intrinsic element of the intensification over the last 20 to 30 years of migrant and diasporic attempts to (re)connect materially and emotionally with 'home'

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Abbott 2006), Pakistan (Joly 1987), Philippines (Okamura 1983), Senegal (Riccio 2001), St. Vincent and The Grenadines (Basch 1987), Tanzania (Mercer et al 2008, 2009), Turkey (Gitmez and Wilpert 1987;

through transnational practices (Portes 1997, 2009; Vertovec and Cohen 1999; Mazzucato and Kabki 2009).

### **Constructing collective transnational power: from ‘migration and development’ to celebratory discourses of ‘diaspora and development’**

Significantly, the transnational practices enacted by diasporans through border-spanning social networks such as migrant organisations are increasingly seen to have important, transformative effects at ‘home’ (Portes et al 1999; Al-Ali and Koser 2002; Sørensen et al 2003a; Vertovec 2001, 2003; de Boeck 2004). This is the central contention underlying the rapidly proliferating academic, policy, and civil society discourses of ‘diaspora and development’ (Zack-Williams 1995; AFFORD 1998, 2000; Mohan 2002, 2006, 2008; Mohan and Zack-Williams 2002; Zack-Williams and Mohan 2002; Henry and Mohan 2003; Newland 2003; Okoth 2003; Abdul-Raheem and Bing 2004; COMPAS 2004a,b; HCIDC 2004; IOM 2004a; Newland with Patrick 2004; USAID 2004; GCIM 2005; Farrant et al 2006; Ionescu 2006; UN 2006; World Bank 2006; Davies 2007; DFID 2007; Merz et al 2007; Styan 2007; Bakewell 2008a; Faist 2008; Mercer et al 2008, 2009; Skeldon 2008; de Haas 2009). Positing diasporans and their organisations as powerful and positive actors in the progress of ‘home’, these globalising discourses reinvigorate, expand and re-orientate established debates on the relationship between international migration and development.

### ***Migration and development***

Prior to the emergence at the dawn of the millennium of distinctly celebratory discourses of diaspora and development, attention tended to focus on the role of uneven development in producing international migration or on the impact of international migration on the development of ‘host’ countries. Much less attention was given to the impact of international migration on the development of countries of origin (Papademetriou and Martin 1991a; Skeldon 1997a; Massey et al 1998; de Hann 1999; Smith 2002; Sørensen et al 2003a; Black et al 2004; Portes 2009). Where this relationship was considered, negative impacts tended to be emphasised (Hermele 1997, Taylor 1999; Sørensen et al 2003a; see for example Piore 1979; Lipton 1982; Böhning 1984; Papademetriou and Martin 1991a,b; Collinson 1996). These conventional,



distinctly pessimistic discourses of 'migration and development' have been characterised as revolving around 'the three R's', namely recruitment, return and remittances (Papademetriou and Martin 1991b; Sørensen et al 2003a).

### *Recruitment*

The notion of recruitment focuses on the types of people who emigrate and usually translates into a concern with the impacts on sending countries of the loss of professionals and skilled workers (Papademetriou and Martin 1991b). This concern underlies the debates on 'brain drain' that emerged in the early 1960s as the first graduates of newly independent developing countries began to leave or not return after training abroad (Ammassari and Black 2001; Olesen 2003). Such outflows are generally seen to have a deeply detrimental impact on countries of origin as they constitute a loss of the 'best and the brightest', depleting an already limited stock of the skilled human capital needed to fill key social, economic and political positions at 'home' (Martin 1991: 32; Ammassari and Black 2001; Sørensen et al 2003a). Furthermore, given the investment of the sending country in educating and training these people, their emigration represents an economic transfer to the receiving country and a loss of expected tax revenue (Papademetriou and Martin 1991a; Ammassari and Black 2001; Newland 2003).

Further exacerbating this perceived problem, well-educated, highly-skilled professionals are often assumed to have the highest propensity to emigrate on the basis that they are more likely to have the necessary financial and social capital and given that their labour is in the greatest demand in the global recruitment market (Martin 1991; Ammassari and Black 2001; Jazayery 2003; Newland 2003; Olesen 2003; Sørensen et al 2003a). Supporting this assumption, Olesen (2003) notes that graduates constitute approximately 60% of all migrants from Ghana, Egypt, and South Africa and 74% of all the African migrants in the US in 1990. Similarly, Black et al (2004) note that a study based on census data from 2000 found that 83% of the 109,000 Nigeria-born migrants in the US aged 25 or over had a tertiary education.

Given the high propensity of the well educated to emigrate, it is argued that many 'developing' countries lose significant proportions of their skilled labour (Papademetriou and Martin 1991a). For example, it is claimed that around 30% of all

'highly educated' Ghanaians and Sierra Leoneans live abroad (Newland 2003) which parallels the World Bank estimate that Africa lost about one third of its professional, highly skilled workers between 1960 and 1987 (Hermele 1997; Ammassari and Black 2001; Olesen 2003). Indeed, it is said that there are more Nigerian academics in the US than in Nigeria (Black et al 2004).

### *Return*

In the wake of the mid-1970s oil crisis which left industrialised 'host' countries in recession and facing growing unemployment, discourses of migration and development shifted their focus from the detrimental impacts of 'brain drain' to the potentially remedial effects of return (Ammassari and Black 2001; Olesen 2003; Sørensen et al 2003a). However, while it was suggested that returnees could benefit their 'home' countries by bringing back human, financial and social capital gained abroad, this promise was ultimately doubted on a number of fronts. It was widely asserted that few migrants gain new skills, knowledge and useful experience abroad as most tend to undertake unskilled labour in the 'host' (Stahl 1989; Papademetriou and Martin 1991a; Ammassari and Black 2001; Sørensen et al 2003a). Furthermore, it was argued that in undertaking unskilled labour, migrants might not even use the skills they already have, becoming deskilled (Lim 1994; Ammassari and Black 2001). If migrants did gain skills abroad, it was contended that they would then be less inclined to return (Papademetriou and Martin 1991a). And even if migrants did return with newly acquired skills, it was claimed that these skills would often be unsuited to the needs of the 'home' economy, making their productive utilisation unlikely (Hermele 1997; Ammassari and Black 2001; Sørensen et al 2003a). Limiting even further the positive impact of returnees, it was suggested that any savings or other financial resources they might bring 'home' would rarely be invested in 'productive' activities but rather largely 'wasted' on 'conspicuous consumption' (Ammassari and Black 2001).

### *Remittances*

The very same argument also held sway in relation to migrant remittances, the money migrants send 'home' to family, kin and friends. Indeed, established discourses of migration and development are dominated by the view that remittance income is 'wasted' at 'home' in that it is overwhelmingly spent on survival and 'conspicuous

consumption' (such as festivals, family events, and consumer durables) rather than being invested in 'productive' activities (Martin 1991; Papademetriou and Martin 1991a; Hermele 1997; de Hann 1999; Ammassari and Black 2001; Black 2003; Gundel 2003; Newland 2003; Sørensen et al 2003a). Consequently, remittances are seen to create dependency amongst recipients at 'home' when they could be used to foster income-generation and self-sustaining development (ibid).

Furthermore, discourses of migration and development tend to see remittance-induced household expenditure not only as 'wasteful' but also as ultimately detrimental to communities and countries of origin. Firstly, it is argued that by increasing consumption without stimulating a concomitant increase in production, remittances cause inflation (Piore 1979; Burki 1991; Islam 1991; Martin 1991; Papademetriou and Martin 1991a; de Hann 1999; Ammassari and Black 2001; Van Hear 2002; Bracking 2003; Gundel 2003; Sørensen et al 2003a). In turn, remittance-induced inflation increases inequality between households as those without relatives abroad face higher prices without the compensation of a remittance income. Therefore, their purchasing power declines relative to that of migrant-sending households (Martin 1991; Bracking 2003).

This is seen to exacerbate the way in which the selectivity of migration reinforces existing income inequalities between households. International migrants tend not to come from the poorest households as these are seen to lack the financial and social capital required to facilitate a member's mobility. Consequently, socio-economic differentiation is seen to be accentuated as it is the already better-off households, rather than the poorest, that receive remittances (Lipton 1982; Papademetriou and Martin 1991a; Portes 1997; Skeldon 1997b, 2002; Massey et al 1998; de Hann 1999; Ammassari and Black 2001; Van Hear 2002, 2003; Black 2003; Bracking 2003; Gundel 2003; Newland 2003; Olesen 2003; Sørensen et al 2003a,b; Sriskandarajah 2003). For de Hann (1999: 31), these inequality-enhancing impacts are "[p]erhaps the most worrying aspect of migration" for countries of origin. Certainly, they are of great concern to development policy which tends, as Sørensen et al (2003b) argue, to stress issues of equity.

## *Diaspora and development*

Since the dawn of the millennium, there has been a strong resurgence of interest in the role of international migration in sending country development. Indeed, writing in 2003, Olesen (152) asserts that the role of migrants in development at 'home' has received "much more attention [...] within the last year than within the previous ten years". Significantly, this renewed interest has been associated with a growing tendency to interpret the relationship much more positively than in established discourses of migration and development. As Styan (2007: 1171, original emphasis) observes, "[...D]iverse UN agencies, the EU, the World Bank, the OECD and the African Union suddenly appear to be outbidding each other in highlighting the *positive* contribution that migration can make to development in Africa and elsewhere". Indeed, proliferating through a host of recent academic, policy, and civil society publications and the nascent initiatives of governments and international agencies, distinctly celebratory discourses of diaspora and development have reinvigorated, expanded, and re-orientated conventional debates about the impact of international migration on development at 'home' (Hermele 1997; Taylor 1999; AFFORD 1998, 2000; Mohan 2002, 2006, 2008; Mohan and Zack-Williams 2002; Zack-Williams and Mohan 2002; Bracking 2003; Gammeltoft 2003; Henry and Mohan 2003; Newland 2003; Sørensen et al 2003a; Van Hear and Sørensen 2003; Vertovec 2003; Black et al 2004; COMPAS 2004a; HCIDC 2004; IOM 2004a, b; Newland with Patrick 2004; USAID 2004; GCIM 2005; Farrant et al 2006; Ionescu 2006; UN 2006; World Bank 2006; Davies 2007; DFID 2007; Merz et al 2007; Styan 2007; Bakewell 2008a; Faist 2008; Mercer et al 2008, 2009; Skeldon 2008; de Haas 2009).

Positing migrants less as a drain of the brains of their countries of origin and more as powerful and positive actors in the progress of 'home', these discourses emphasize the substantial and growing volume of household remittances and radically reinterpret their impact. Furthermore, by widening the conventional debate to include notions of diaspora and migrant transnationalism, these discourses highlight a multitude of additional border-spanning linkages, networks, and flows through which overseas nationals can produce beneficial economic, social, cultural, and political effects at 'home'. As Faist (2008: 21) argues:

The new enthusiasm, sometimes described as the ‘new mantra’ (Kapur, 2004), around migration and development hinges on a number of strong claims. They can be summarised in the statement that the flows of money, knowledge and universal ideas – called remittances – can have a positive effect on what is called development in the countries of emigration.

In these ways, then, international migrants and their descendents are increasingly being seen as a resource with “enormous potential” for the development of their countries of origin (de Boeck 2004: 3; Sørensen et al 2003a; Faist 2008).

### *Recognising and reinterpreting household remittances*

As noted above, a key factor underlying the generation of celebratory discourses of diaspora and development is a wider recognition of the substantial volume and impressive growth of migrant remittances (Hermele 1997; Black 2003; Newland 2003, 2007; Kapur 2004; Farrant et al 2006; World Bank 2006; Styan 2007; Bakewell 2008a; Faist 2008). Data from the International Monetary Fund and World Bank show that formally recorded annual global remittances increased from less than US\$2 billion in 1970 to US\$75 billion in the early 1990s, reaching US\$100 billion in 2000 (Russell 1992; Sørensen et al 2003a; Vertovec 2003). Official remittances to ‘developing’ countries were estimated to represent 60% of the global total in 2000 (Newland 2003; Sørensen et al 2003a; Vertovec 2003) and reached an estimated \$199 billion in 2006 (Bakewell 2008a). Accumulated over the 1990s, remittances were around 20 per cent higher than flows of official development assistance (ODA) (Sørensen et al 2003b; see also Gammeltoft 2003). Indeed, with official remittances to ‘developing’ countries almost doubling and ODA declining by 16 per cent, the relative importance of the former increased notably over the decade (Gammeltoft 2003; Newland 2003).

The volume and development potential of remittances is even greater when one considers that officially recorded remittances represent “only the tip of the iceberg” (Puri and Ritzema 1999: 3). A variety of informal transfer channels such as unregulated agencies, migrants carrying money by hand on return visits and in-kind ‘gifts’ mean that the volume of officially unrecorded remittances is often found to be substantial (Russell et al 1990; Werbner 1990; Hulshof 1991; Lowell and de la Garza 2000; Sumata 2002; Bracking 2003; Gammeltoft 2003; Gundel 2003; Newland 2003; Sriskandarajah 2003; Vertovec 2003; UN 2006; Pieke et al 2007; Styan 2007). The UK Department for

International Development asserts that informal remittances represent twice or three times the amount of formally transferred funds (Bracking 2003). Puri and Ritzema's (1999) survey of estimates made for 11 different countries between the late 1970s and early 1990s found that unrecorded remittances vary between 8 and 85 per cent of the total with an average of 36 per cent. In the case of Africa, the London-based African Foundation for Development (AFFORD 2000) estimates that only 50 per cent of remittances go through formal channels.

While there are differing estimations, it is clear that remittances to Nigeria are of a significant volume. The Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago estimates that Nigerians in the US alone send \$1.3 billion per annum (Black et al 2004). According to the IOM (2002), total official remittances to Nigeria increased from US\$10.01 million in 1990 to US\$1301.06 million in 1999 and constituted nearly 30 percent of financial inflows to the country. Gammeltoft (2003) records that Nigeria received a total of US\$6.5 billion in official remittances between 1995-1999, making it the 13<sup>th</sup> largest receiver in the world and the largest in sub-Saharan Africa. Over the same period, Nigeria was also the largest receiver of official remittances in relation to aid in sub-Saharan Africa, and the 10<sup>th</sup> largest in the world, with US\$6.8 of remittances for every US dollar of aid received (ibid: 109). Furthermore, the Central Bank of Nigeria reported that recorded remittances reached as much as US\$2.26 billion in 2004 and it is estimated that unrecorded remittances would have brought the total remittance inflow for that year to approximately US\$5 billion (Hernandez-Coss and Bun 2007).

In addition to a much heightened recognition of the sheer size and notable growth of remittances, globalising discourses of diaspora and development emerge from a radical reassessment of the impact of these flows at 'home', which are increasingly being celebrated as the aspect of international mobility carrying the most potential for direct and positive development outcomes (Van Hear 1998; de Hann 1999; Taylor 1999; Gammeltoft 2003; Skeldon 2002; Bracking 2003; HCIDC 2004; Farrant et al 2006; World Bank 2006; Styan 2007; de Haas 2009). This reassessment has much to do with a re-conceptualisation of migration. Rather than seeing mobility as the product of individual acts of rational economic self-interest (as in the classic work of Todaro (1969) and Harris and Todaro (1970) for example), decisions to move are increasingly being viewed in the broader context of family livelihood strategies aimed at distributing resources across space to increase household income and reduce risk (Russell et al

1990; Stark 1991; Adepoju 1995; Findley 1997; Ammassari and Black 2001; de Hann 1999; Taylor 1999; Landolt 2001; Mohan and Zack-Williams 2002; Van Hear 2002; UN 2006; de Haas 2009). In this context of an individual's migration being initiated and funded by the family for the benefit of the household, the sending of remittances becomes the key way in which the strong, implicitly contractual obligations placed on the migrant are fulfilled (ibid).

As a result of such thinking, spatial mobility in order to generate remittances has come to be seen not only as an increasingly important household livelihood strategy to increase families' income and standard of living but also as an essential household *survival* strategy (Burki 1991; Basch et al 1994; Roberts et al 1999; MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000; Landolt 2001; Zack-Williams and Mohan 2002; Sørensen et al 2003a,b; Styan 2007). For example, studies in Somalia calculate that remittances constitute nearly 40 per cent of the income of urban households (Gundel 2003). Indeed, a number of authors writing on different national contexts argue that many families could not sustain themselves without the "crucial 'safety net'" represented by remittances (Al-Ali et al 2001a: 620; Van Hear 2002, 2003; Zack-Williams and Mohan 2002; Bracking 2003; Gundel 2003; Jazayeri 2003; Newland 2003; Sriskandarajah 2003; Newland 2007).

Beyond highlighting how remittances are critical in household survival and livelihood strategies, discourses of diaspora and development also afford greater emphasis to studies that provide evidence of the investment of remittances, particularly in agricultural equipment and small businesses (Cornelius 1990; Escobar and Martinez 1990; Russell et al 1990; Hermele 1997; Ahmed 2000; Ammassari and Black 2001; van Doorn 2001; Newland 2007; de Haas 2009). Contrary to the pessimistic tenets of conventional discourses of migration and development, this 'productive' spending has been found to reach significant levels in some cases, especially once pressing survival and consumption needs have been met (Oberai and Singh 1980; de Hann 1999; Taylor 1999; Van Hear 2002; Piracha and Vickerman 2002; Sørensen et al 2003a; de Haas 2009).

Moreover, it is argued that these established discourses have underplayed the indirect 'productive' effects of remittance-induced consumption expenditure. A central argument of the 'new economics of labour migration' is that by meeting immediate

consumption needs, remittances free up other elements of household income for direct investment in 'productive' activities (Taylor 1999; Van Hear 2002; UN 2006; de Haas 2009). Indeed, migrant-sending households have been found to have a higher propensity to invest than households without migrants (Adams 1998). It has also been argued that some apparently 'unproductive' expenditures on factors such as food, shelter, medical care, cultural and family events and education are likely to increase productivity in the long term by improving family health, developing skills and building social capital (Russell 1992; Taylor 1999; Frank and Hummer 2002; Mohan and Robinson 2002; Van Hear 2002; Sørensen et al 2003a; Vertovec 2003; UN 2006; Newland 2007).

Furthermore, challenging concerns emphasised in conventional discourses of migration and development about remittance-induced social inequality, greater attention is now given to channels through which remittances benefit migrant and non-migrant households alike. Principal among these is a remittance multiplier effect through which the spending of remittances on consumption stimulates local production and thereby creates employment and other-income generating opportunities for households that do not receive remittances (Appleyard 1989, 1992; Stahl 1989; Durand et al 1996; Hermele 1997; de Hann 1999; Taylor 1999; Black 2003; Vertovec 2003; UN 2006; Newland 2007; Bakewell 2008a; Skeldon 2008; de Haas 2009). In this way, beneficial effects of remittances can be transmitted from migrant-sending households to non-migrant-sending households. A further key channel that is seen to distribute the benefits of migration more widely across a sending community, and one that has only recently begun to attract notable attention, is the transfer of 'collective remittances', the monetary and material contributions made by migrant associations to their communities and countries of origin (Goldring 2004). This form of remittance has been highlighted and increasingly lauded as globalising discourses of diaspora and development seek to move the migration-development debate beyond the conventional confines of 'brain drain', return and household remittances to embrace a multitude of alternative diasporic activities and transnational practices that carry much potential for the progress of 'home'.

### *Embracing migrant transnationalism and diaspora*

As noted earlier, the literature on 'migrant transnationalism' has fostered a growing recognition of the extent and intensity with which migrants and their descendents



maintain multi-faceted border-spanning linkages with 'home'. Embedded in transnational social networks such as diaspora organisations and manifested in circular flows of people, money, materials, information, and ideas, these linkages are increasingly seen to have much potential for inciting positive social, economic, political, and cultural change at 'home'. Indeed, Newland (2003: 3) asserts, "[...T]ransnational networks are today the most important developmental resource associated with international migration".

Given that the maintenance of transnational ties to 'home' is a defining characteristic of the diasporic condition, an exploration of their transformative potential is at the heart of globalising discourses of diaspora and development (Zack-Williams 1995; AFFORD 1998, 2000; Mohan 2002, 2006, 2008; Mohan and Zack-Williams 2002; Zack-Williams and Mohan 2002; Henry and Mohan 2003; Newland 2003; Okoth 2003; Sørensen et al 2003a; Van Hear and Sørensen 2003; COMPAS 2004a,b; HCIDC 2004; IOM 2004a,b Newland with Patrick 2004; USAID 2004; GCIM 2005; Ionescu 2006; UN 2006; DFID 2007; Davies 2007; Merz et al 2007; Styán 2007; Faist 2008; Mercer et al 2008, 2009). In moving beyond the boundaries of conventional debates on migration and development to embrace a multitude of alternative ways in which migrants can influence 'home' from afar, these celebratory discourses emphasise three key modes of border-spanning practice: collective remittances, social remittances, and political transnationalism. Significantly, diaspora organisations have been identified as central to each of these modes of transnational intervention and are therefore being lauded, and increasingly engaged, as powerful and positive actors in the development of 'home'. As Faist (2008: 22) notes, "[...T]ransnational networks and associations of migrants have come to stand at the centre of the optimistic visions of national and international economic development policy establishments".

### *Collective remittances: alleviating poverty and promoting the public good*

In expanding the framework for exploring border-spanning ties with 'home', globalising discourses of diaspora and development have highlighted the diasporic practice of coming together to send collective monetary and material contributions to communities and countries of origin (Vertovec 2003; Goldring 2004; COMPAS 2004b; GCIM 2005; Babcock 2006; Orozco and Rouse 2007; Page 2007; Portes et al 2007; Mazzucato 2008; Mercer et al 2008, 2009; Mazzucato and Kabki 2009, Portes 2009). In contrast to the

household remittances sent by migrants to their family members at 'home', these 'collective remittances' are sent by organised groups of migrants and their descendents and tend to be aimed at projects designed to have a wider communal or social benefit (ibid.). Indeed, "connecting immigrants with development projects back home" is often seen as the central role of diaspora organisations, particularly HTAs (Attah-Poku 1996: 63; Okamura 1983; Josephides 1987; Levitt 1997; Guarnizo et al 1999; Adeyanju 2000; Owusu 2000; Goldring 2004; USAID 2004; Caglar 2006). It is argued that the collective remittances transmitted through diaspora organisations are generated largely through membership fees and fundraising events and tend to be aimed at health, education and public infrastructure projects at 'home' (ibid; AFFORD 1998; Danese 1998; Goldring 1998; Liu 1998; Popkin 1999; Landolt et al 1999; Roberts et al 1999; Adeyanju 2000; Kerlin 2000; Ndofor-Tah 2000; Orozco 2000, 2003, 2004; Uduku 2000, 2002; Henry and Mohan 2003; Vertovec 2003; HCIDC 2004; Orozco and Lapointe 2004; Orozco and Welle 2004; GCIM 2005; Babcock 2006; Mohan 2006, 2008; UN 2006; Cano and Délano 2007; DFID 2007; Orozco and Rouse 2007; Page 2007; Portes et al 2007; Faist 2008; Fox and Bada 2008; Kleist 2008; Mazzucato 2008; Mercer et al 2008, 2009; Mazzucato and Kabki 2009; Østergaard-Nielsen 2009).

Exemplifying this, Levitt (1997) recounts how a Dominican HTA in Boston, the Miraflores Development Committee, raised funds over 25 years to purchase more than 80% of the land where community facilities have been built in Miraflores. Between 1992 and 1994, it raised approximately \$70,000 to build an aqueduct, to renovate the village school, health clinic and community centre, and to fund the salary and medical supplies of the town's physicians (ibid). Illustrating how collective remittances can also be made in-kind, in 1983 the Kwahuman Association of New York shipped around US\$12,000 worth of medical drugs and other equipment, including 40 beds and mattresses and 13 patient side-tables, to the hospital serving its 'clan' area in Ghana, following this in 1992 with a further 100 hospital beds (Attah-Poku 1996).

While the literature tends to concern itself with simply describing such associational contributions rather than with assessing their relative importance and effects (Ndofor-Tah 2000, Babcock 2006), some authors have suggested that their magnitude and impacts are considerable. For example, Orozco and Rouse (2007: 5) contend, "In Mexican hometowns with fewer than 3,000 people, HTA donations are equal to more than 50% of the money in municipal public works budgets. In towns with populations

under 1,000 people, HTA donations can amount to up to seven times the public works budget [...]”. Similarly, Portes et al (2007: 256) highlight the work of a Dominican HTA, arguing that it has “literally transformed” its hometown which, they claim, “has grown increasingly reliant on the loyalty and generosity of their migrants for a number of needs unattended by the national government”. Indeed, in summing-up the contribution of HTAs, Portes and Landolt (2000: 543) claim:

Life conditions in municipalities that receive ‘grassroots transnational aid’ confirm the economic relevance of this collective remittance strategy. Towns with a home town association [abroad] have paved roads, electricity, and freshly painted public buildings. [...]he quality of life in transnational towns is quite simply better.

By directing funds towards public services and infrastructure projects, the collective remittances sent by diaspora organisations have the potential to benefit migrant and non-migrant households alike (Orozco 2000, 2003, 2004; Sørensen et al 2003b; Orozco and Lapointe 2004; GCIM 2005; Orozco and Rouse 2007; Fox and Bada 2008; Mazzucato 2008; Mercer et al 2008; Mazzucato and Kabki 2009; Portes 2009). Furthermore, these transfers are often seen to be targeted at projects that will be of most benefit to disadvantaged groups; for example, Orozco and Rouse (2007) assert, “[...] these donations are channelled primarily to the poor”. In such ways, collective remittances are lauded for countering any inequality that individual remittances might create between migrant and non-migrant sending households, preventing areas of origin turning into examples of Galbraith’s ‘private affluence and public squalor’ where, for example, new homes are accessible only over dirt roads (Martin 1991; Widgren and Martin 2002; Vertovec 2003).

Moreover, collective remittances are also seen to support ‘productive’ projects at ‘home’, often being invested directly in ‘income-generating’ initiatives such as “microenterprises” and “agricultural activities” (Orozco and Rouse 2007; see also Orozco 2000, 2003). “These types of projects are significant”, argue Orozco and Rouse 2007, “because of the potential they have to promote equity [...]”. Furthermore, Vertovec (2003: 41) asserts, “Channelled remittances – especially pooled funds represented by HTAs – can go a long way toward supporting the establishment and work of MFIs” (see also USAID 2004). Indeed, it is argued that by engaging micro-finance institutions (MFIs) in these ways, diaspora organisations can facilitate the release of funds acquired through international mobility to members of non-migrant

households, thereby ameliorating both the inequitable impacts of individual remittances and the credit constraints that are often seen to undermine 'productive' investment in migrant-sending areas (ibid; Orozco 2002).

*Social remittances: transferring bright ideas and good behaviour*

In addition to facilitating collective transfers of money and materials, transnational social networks such as diaspora organisations are increasingly being celebrated as channels for the transmission 'home' of developmentally-beneficial knowledge, ideas, values, norms, practices, and behaviours (Al-Ali et al 2001a; Ammassari and Black 2001; Gundel 2003; Sørensen et al 2003a; Van Hear 2003; Vertovec 2003; HCIDC 2004; Orozco and Welle 2004; GCIM 2005; Taylor et al 2006; UN 2006; Newland 2007; Faist 2008; Fox and Bada 2008; Kleist 2008; Portes 2009). This celebration has built upon and expanded Peggy Levitt's (1998) influential notion of 'social remittances'. In advancing this concept, she contends that migrants adopt or hybridise some of the 'new' ideas, values, and beliefs they are exposed to in the 'host' society and then remit them to people at 'home' through transnational social practices such as return visits, international telephone calls, and the organising of collective contributions to community development.

These social remittances are seen to influence the 'normative structures' that exist at 'home' (ibid: 926). Such structures include modes of interpersonal behaviour, notions of intra-family responsibility, standards of age and gender appropriateness, principles of neighbourliness and community participation, aspirations for social mobility, and expectations about organizational performance (ibid). In the case of the small village of Miraflores in the Dominican Republic, Levitt (1998) argues that social remittances have produced more liberatory notions of womanhood, a greater awareness of individual rights, and heightened demands for a more democratic politics, a more independent judiciary, a more accountable business community, and a more effective social welfare sector.

Significantly, Levitt (1998) identifies a Boston-based HTA, the Miraflores Development Committee (MDC), as a particularly effective channel of social remittance transfer. This effectiveness derives from the MDC's close collaboration and regular contact with a counterpart organisation in Miraflores (ibid). Through such transnational

networking, the MDC was able to encourage its 'home'-based partner to adopt the "stronger financial controls" practiced in the US with the result that "migrants' donations toward community projects began to be more carefully managed" (ibid: 941). Given the capacity of migrant organisations to transfer social remittances, Levitt (1998: 927) contends that policymakers can utilise these groups to "channel certain kinds of information [about health, education, business skills, and community organisation techniques, she suggests] to particular groups with positive results". Endorsing this call, USAID (2004: 29) argues that being engaged by HTAs in the design and implementation of projects enables non-migrants to "gain capabilities that will facilitate future economic development – such as decision-making, organizational and management skills" (see also Fox and Bada 2008).

Indeed, since Levitt (1998: 926) advanced the notion of social remittances as "migration driven local-level forms of cultural diffusion", the concept has been widely embraced in discourses of diaspora and development and expanded to refer to the transfer 'home' of any knowledge, idea, value, practice or behaviour deemed developmentally beneficial, whether at the local or national level. In this way, diasporans and their organisations have come to be celebrated and engaged as "conduits" of vital human, intellectual and moral capital that can transform not only local communities but also entire nations (GCIM 2005: 23), promoting, for example, such grand ideas, principles and practices as "human rights, gender equity and democracy" (Faist 2008: 22).

Diasporans and their organisations are attracting particular attention as channels for the transnational transfer of technical and professional knowledge and skills. Lauding this diasporic capability, Portes (2009: 16) asserts, "[...] a community of professional expatriates can make a significant contribution to the scientific and technological development of their home country". Building on such contentions, 'home' and 'host' governments and international agencies are increasingly looking to organise and engage diasporans. For example, the United Nations (UN 2006: 19) contends, "Actively encouraging and supporting the formation of transnational associations involving researchers at home and abroad may be particularly important to enhance knowledge exchange". Similarly, the Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM 2005: 30) "[...] endorses the efforts being made to mobilize diaspora knowledge networks", arguing that this is "[...] an objective which is most effectively achieved by supporting the establishment of professional migrant organizations [...]". Exemplifying such

thinking, the International Organisation for Migration's 'Migration for Development in Africa' (MIDA) programme has identified diaspora organisations as key targets in its efforts to facilitate the exchange of ideas and expertise between diasporic African professionals and their 'home'-based colleagues (de Boeck 2004; IOM 2004a,b).

*Political transnationalism: influencing progress from afar*

In addition to lauding social and collective remittances, globalising discourses of diaspora and development also draw on the literature on migrant transnationalism to celebrate a growing engagement between diasporans, their states of origin and the politics of 'home'. While it is recognised that migrants and their descendents have long been concerned with 'homeland politics', it is argued that their ability to act on this concern has increased significantly in recent decades as a result of advances in, and wider access to, global telecommunications and transport. What is seen to be especially significant about this intensified 'political transnationalism' is the role of diasporans and their organisations in utilising the strategic space of diaspora to lobby the 'home' state on issues they believe to be of particular relevance to the development of their communities and countries of origin (Adamson 2002; Østergaard-Nielsen 2002; Newland with Patrick 2004; Orozco and Welle 2004; Cordero-Guzmán 2005; UN 2006; Cano and Délano 2007; Fox and Bada 2008; Kleist 2008; McGregor 2009). The often implicit assumption seems to be that such diasporic political interventions are likely to support 'progressive' ends and causes, such as democracy, good governance and public investment.

Intensified political transnationalism is widely seen to be encouraged further by the increasingly common practice of 'home' governments recognising, and attempting to channel, the economic and political contributions made by diasporans. This move towards the 'transnational reincorporation' (Guarnizo and Smith 1998) of overseas 'nationals' into the 'home' economy and polity involves extending citizenship rights to expatriates, establishing consular outreach programmes, giving seats to diaspora representatives in legislatures, providing channels for remittances and offering investment opportunities (Basch et al 1994; Vertovec 1999, 2001, 2003; Levitt 2001; Guarnizo et al 2003; Newland 2003; Koser 2003c; Sørensen et al 2003b; Abdul-Raheem and Bing 2004; GCIM 2005; Portes et al 2007; Styan 2007; Faist 2008; Gamlen 2008; Østergaard-Nielsen 2009). For Itzigsohn (2000), it is the expansion of 'home' state

politics beyond national borders to engage diasporas that distinguishes contemporary processes of migrant transnationalism as 'new'. Through this 'deterritorializing' of the nation-state (Basch et al 1994), the opportunities for international migrants and their descendents to participate directly in formal political processes at 'home' are constantly expanding. As such diasporas are increasingly able to influence process of change at 'home' by voting in national elections, electing diaspora representatives, financially supporting political parties, becoming actively involved in election campaigns and contributing to the drafting of constitutions (Al-Ali et al 2001a; Portes 2001; Adamson 2002; Guarnizo et al 2003; Jazayery 2003; Koser 2003c; Van Hear and Sørensen 2003; Vertovec 2003).

Significantly, Itzigsohn (2000) also argues that diaspora organisations are key actors in this mode of 'political transnationalism'. Indeed, in a number of cases, the lobbying of 'home' governments by migrant associations has been seen as a critical force in highlighting the potential role of diaspora and achieving the extension of citizenship rights to expatriates (ibid; Sassen-Koob 1979; Popkin 1999; Owusu 2000; Itzigsohn and Villacrés 2008). Furthermore, migrant associations are highlighted as important points of contact and interaction with the diaspora for campaigning 'home' country politicians and for the outreach institutions established by sending states (Okamura 1983; Basch 1987; Guarnizo and Smith 1998; Liu 1998; Minghuan 1998; Itzigsohn et al 1999; Landolt et al 1999; Popkin 1999; Roberts et al 1999; Vertovec 1999, 2003; Kerlin 2000; Uduku 2000; Levitt 2001; Henry and Mohan 2003; Cordero-Guzmán 2005; Mohan 2006, 2008; Dumont 2008; Itzigsohn and Villacrés 2008). And through these outreach institutions, such as consulates, embassies, cultural centres and departments of expatriate affairs, states of origin have even begun to support the activities of migrant associations by, for example, offering advice on the regularisation of immigration status in the 'host', providing premises for meetings and cultural events, operating a channel for remittance transfer and giving technical assistance, training, and funds for enacting development projects at 'home' (ibid).

Held-up as the exemplar of 'home' government attempts to engage diaspora organisations, Mexico's 'Program for Mexican Communities Abroad' (PCME) has since the early 1990s assisted the establishment and reinvigoration of HTAs in the US and promoted the creation of state-level umbrella organisations (Goldring 1998; Mahler 1998; Landolt et al 1999; Popkin 1999; Portes 1997, 1999; Roberts et al 1999; Orozco

2003; Orozco with Lapointe 2004, USAID 2004; Cano and Délano 2007; Fox and Bada 2008). The PCME's most notable scheme is what has become the 'three for one' arrangement whereby the municipal, state, and federal levels of government each donate a dollar for every dollar raised by a HTA for a development project at 'home' (ibid). In 2002, the entire programme generated as much as US\$43.5 million from HTAs and the three tiers of government for development projects (USAID 2004).

The diasporic location is also celebrated for enabling overseas 'nationals' and their organisations to act as 'ambassadors', lobbying 'host' governments on issues of concern to their communities and countries of origin such as foreign policy, trade and international development assistance (Mohan and Zack-Williams 2002; Sørensen et al 2003a; Kalinde 2004). For example, Kerlin (2000) reports that Guinea-Bissauan HTAs in Portugal petitioned the 'host' government to increase aid to their 'home' state during its civil war of 1998-9 and joined with 'sister' HTAs in France and across Europe in protesting against France's position on the conflict. Similarly, it is noted that UK-based diaspora organisations have been lobbying the UK Department for International Development (DFID) to involve them in the formulation of policy towards their countries of origin, arguing that, through first-hand experience and regular contact, they have a more intimate understanding of the needs of 'home' (AFFORD 1998; Ndofo-Tah 2000; DFID 2001; HCIDC 2004; Newland with Patrick 2004; Styan 2007). This lobbying forms part of a wider effort by UK-based diaspora organisations to win recognition and support for their transnational contributions to development at 'home' (ibid.). Significantly, DFID has responded and, for a period of three years from 2003, it funded the formation and operation of 'Connections for Development' (CfD), an umbrella organisation for 'Black and Minority Ethnic Organisations' designed to give them a voice in the UK's development policy design process (DFID 2003, 2007). CfD has also been tasked with exploring ways in which DFID can help fund development projects undertaken by diaspora organisations in their countries of origin (ibid).

This reflects a growing argument that diaspora organisations constitute networks through which international development assistance can be channelled directly to 'grassroots communities', avoiding the public sector inefficiencies and corruption that conventional state-to-state transfers often experience (Levitt 1997; Danese 1998; AFFORD 1998; Kerlin 2000; Orozco 2003, 2004; DFID 2001, 2007; Vertovec 2003; HCIDC 2004; Newland with Patrick 2004; Orozco with Lapointe 2004; USAID 2004;



GCIM 2005; Hernandez-Coss and Bun 2007; Ionescu 2006; UN 2006; Orozco and Rouse 2007; Mercer et al 2008; Østergaard-Nielsen 2009; Mazzucato and Kabki 2009). Following this logic, the Inter-American Foundation, an US government agency, is co-funding and providing technical assistance and training for HTA projects in Mexico, Haiti, Honduras, and El Salvador (Newland with Patrick 2004; USAID 2004). Similarly, the European Union has operated a scheme that covers 80% of the costs of projects undertaken by North African and Middle Eastern migrant associations (Danese 1998) and the French government has provided funds to migrant organisations within the framework of its 'co-development' agreements with Mali, Senegal, and Morocco (Newland with Patrick 2004).

### **Conclusion: questioning the construction of collective transnational power**

It is clear that in globalising discourses of diaspora and development, diaspora organisations are identified and celebrated as key transnational infrastructures for effecting positive change at 'home'. Consequently, these groups are increasingly being lauded as entities that international agencies interested in pursuing more direct and participatory modes of development assistance should support. However, some argue that such celebrations are based on limited knowledge. For example, Portes et al (2007: 277) contends that the study of "immigrant transnational organizations" is "still in its infancy". Similarly, a 2004 report on diaspora organisations claims that "their structure, strategies and influences on local and national development are only minimally understood" (COMPAS 2004a).

Indeed, where diaspora organisations and their border-spanning activities are addressed it tends to be within wider studies of migrant transnationalism in which they do not constitute the specific focus of research (Portes and Landolt 2000; Vertovec 2003; Newland with Patrick 2004; USAID 2004). Furthermore, as a number of authors note, this literature focuses largely on the particular context of Latin American and Caribbean migration to the US (Al-Ali and Koser 2002; Smith 2002; Caglar 2006). Consequently, there is relatively little work on the transnational activities and organisations of the 'new African diasporas' produced by substantial postcolonial migrations out of Africa. Such work is especially lacking in the context of Europe and the UK in particular. Grillo and Mazzucato (2008: 192) therefore call for "Further detailed empirical work on development initiatives emanating from African (village or other) associations based in

Europe”, asking, “do they really work, if so for whom?” “Such initiatives have, [...], rarely been subjected to detailed scrutiny”, they argue, claiming that the literature “has yet to address the complexities of such transnational activities” (ibid: 186).

Furthermore, it is clear that there is an especially notable dearth of research about the emergence and transnational practices of Nigerian diasporas and their organisations. In a report on Nigerian international migration and its relationship with development at ‘home’, de Haas (2006: 25) asserts:

There is a striking, almost total lack of basic data and research on Nigerian migration and its reciprocal connections with national and regional development. Therefore, more research on the nature and recent trends of Nigerian migration as well as its development implications is urgently needed in order to elaborate policies that can enhance the development potentials of migration.

Moreover, engaging with London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations not only responds to pressing needs to explore African and especially Nigerian migrant transnationalism, particularly in a UK context, but also attends to the calls noted above for a better understanding of the nature and transnational effects of diaspora organisations in general. For example, in the existing literature on diaspora organisations, the focus has almost exclusively been on HTAs. Given their pervasiveness and tendency to operate transnationally, these groups are undeniably critical forms of diaspora organisation and absolutely demand attention, particularly in the understudied context of their formation by diasporic Nigerians. However, I contend that it is necessary to begin to afford more analytical space to other forms of diaspora organisation that are not explicitly grounded in such localised identities, such as issue- or profession-based groups that might be more oriented to national visions of belonging and development. Furthermore, as Mazzucato and Kabki (2009) argue, there are very few studies that combine a substantive focus on diaspora organisations with an empirical exploration of their sites of intervention at ‘home’. Clearly, there is a need for research that not only devotes particular attention to diaspora organisations but also employs a multi-sited approach to comprehend both the formulation of collective transnational interventions ‘abroad’ and their effects at ‘home’. Only then will it be possible to start engaging critically with, and better assess the promise of, celebratory discourses of diaspora and development.

### **3. Questioning globalising discourses of diaspora and development: research design, methods and data**

#### **Introduction**

In Chapter 2 it was argued that there is a pressing need to subject the rapidly proliferating discourses of diaspora and development to more rigorous empirical assessment, especially in terms of the much vaunted role they ascribe to diaspora organisations in the development of ‘home’. It was also argued that such assessment is particularly necessary in the context of African, and especially Nigerian, migration to the UK and that two-ended studies are needed to better comprehend the effects that diaspora organisations produce at ‘home’. This chapter sets out the research design, methods, and data utilised in this study in its attempt to meet these empirical imperatives.

The chapter opens by detailing the three key research questions around which the empirical research is designed and through which the thesis seeks to assess the claims made of diaspora organisations in globalising discourses of diaspora and development. Drawing on the increasingly established approach of ‘multi-sited ethnography’ (Marcus 1995), the chapter then outlines the challenges, possibilities, and value of attempting to engage empirically with both the ‘host’ and ‘home’ contexts in understanding diasporans’ individual and collective transnational practices. Building on this multi-sited framework, the chapter moves on to detail the three-stage programme of research upon which this thesis is based. The aims and conduct of the initial scoping study are discussed, most notably how a range of London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations was identified and engaged in this research. The selection and exploration of five-case study organisations is described before the chapter closes with an account of the fieldwork undertaken at the sites in Nigeria at which these organisations intervene.

#### **Research questions**

*1) What forms do London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations take and what are the dynamics surrounding their creation, composition and operation?*

In addressing this question, I aim to engage not only hometown associations (HTAs) but also something of the diversity of alternative organisational forms and identities mobilised by London-based Nigerians, such as professional associations and issue-based NGOs. In so doing, I also aim to assess the scale and composition of memberships and identify the range of organisational activities undertaken.

In particular, I place emphasis on exploring individual motivations for forming, joining and participating in diaspora organisations. The negotiation and renegotiation of individual desires in the process of constructing collective aims and objectives is critical to understanding the forms that these organisations take, the nature and focus of their activities, and why these characteristics might change through time. As such, comprehending how the internal politics of organisations operate becomes a central area of analytical concern, especially in terms of tracing levels of inclusion and relations of power along lines such as gender, socio-economic status and generation.

*2) How, why and to what extent do these organisations connect with 'home' and what social, economic, political, and cultural effects do they produce there?*

To identify any impacts that the organisations have at 'home' it is necessary to chart the relations that they might have with Nigeria in terms of the border-crossing flows of people, money, materials, information, ideas, and values that they bring into being. I aim to place these transnational flows and linkages in the context of any strategies that the organisations have for making interventions in Nigeria. In order to understand these transnational strategies, I am interested in what it is the organisations aim to influence in Nigeria, what activities they engage in to exert this influence, and what effects they intend to produce.

Analysing the processes through which these strategies are designed and implemented will extend beyond an engagement with the internal dynamics of the organisations to consider how far people living at the sites of intervention are given an opportunity to shape and benefit from the activities and projects undertaken by the organisations. It is critical to identify who the organisations engage and potentially empower at 'home' as any patterns of inclusion and exclusion carry significant socio-political implications in terms of reinforcing or challenging established power hierarchies. It is also of critical

importance to explore any political repercussions that might be produced at 'home' by the transnational mobilisation of different identities and constituencies.

Throughout my overall investigation of the transnational effects produced by diaspora organisations, I am particularly concerned to give analytical weight to how these impacts are envisioned, enacted and assessed by the people most intimately involved with them, namely, organisation members and people who live at the sites of intervention in Nigeria. In so doing, I hope to highlight the ways in which 'development' is constructed, practiced, contested and negotiated transnationally.

### *3) What factors influence the ability of these organisations to produce transformative effects at 'home'?*

I aim to investigate the factors, both internal and external, that heighten or constrain the transnational capabilities of the organisations and determine the extent to which they can contribute to development at 'home'. In part, this research question responds to a strand of work that has attempted to give some grounding to prevailing idealisations of migrant transnationalism by drawing attention to the realities of diasporic life that can limit the desire and ability of migrants and their descendents to contribute to 'home' (de Hann 1999; Al-Ali et al 2001b; Ammassari and Black 2001; Mohan and Zack-Williams 2002; Sørensen et al 2003b). From this perspective, it is important to understand, for example, how the insertion of diasporans into the labour market might affect their capacity to initiate and support collective transnational intervention.

This research question also responds to a strand of work that highlights the importance of an 'enabling environment' for diasporic intervention at 'home' (see for example Gundel (2003)). Given the rapidly expanding policy interest in diaspora and development, a key issue here is the role of the state in heightening or constraining the transnational capabilities of diaspora organisations. For example, it is essential to ask how states hinder or facilitate cross-border flows of people, money, materials, information and ideas. Of particular concern is how any efforts by states to directly engage and support diaspora organisations have been implemented and received.

## A multi-sited approach

In order to explore the research questions outlined above it is necessary to conduct a two-ended study that involves a personal engagement through participant observation, questionnaire survey and in-depth interview with Nigerian organisations in London and the sites of their interventions in Nigeria. This research strategy reflects the increasingly established practice of what Marcus (1995) calls ‘multi-sited ethnography’. Influenced by ‘postmodern’ tendencies to destabilise fixed conceptual categories and impelled by “empirical changes in the world” that increasingly appear to transgress social, economic, political and cultural boundaries and to connect localities in novel and more intense ways, this mode of ethnography breaks out from a conventional single-sited, rigidly contained notion of the ‘field’ to explore the multi-faceted linkages and flows that occur across space and between places (ibid: 97). Consequently, “[m]ulti-sited research is designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography” (Marcus 1995: 105).

Emerging from social and cultural anthropology, this research framework is increasingly employed to trace various border-spanning processes across and within their multiple sites of activity, highlighting the flows of people, capital, goods, information, ideas, meanings and values that they bring into being (Appadurai 1991; Marcus 1995; Hannerz 1998). Along with the expansion of transnational corporations, international commodity transfers, global media and cyberspace, the growth of international migration and diasporas has been a major force behind the utilisation and development of multi-sited ethnography (ibid). Emphasising the challenge presented to ethnographic theory and practice by human mobility, Appadurai (1991: 191, original emphasis) writes, “As groups migrate, regroup in new locations, reconstruct their histories, and reconfigure their ethnic ‘projects’, the *ethno* in ethnography takes on a slippery, nonlocalized quality, to which the descriptive practices of anthropology will have to respond”.

The movement of people, along with other, often associated global flows, undermines the traditional imagination of the ethnographic landscape as a series of discrete, rigidly

bounded, self-contained, and place-specific 'communities' and 'cultures' (Abu-Lughod 1991; Appadurai 1991; Gupta and Ferguson 1997; D'Alisera 2004). As these socio-cultural formations expand beyond, and interact across, the boundaries of specific locations such as the village, town, and neighbourhood, the conventional ethnographic strategy of delimiting 'the field' in terms of these localised sites becomes inadequate. Charting and accounting for the (re)production of socio-cultural formations across the variety of sites they engage requires a reconceptualisation of 'the field' which is delocalised, dynamic, and multiple (ibid).

The beginnings of such a reframing in migration studies are identified by Hannerz (1998) in Watson's (1977) edited collection, *Between Two Cultures*. Hannerz (1998) sees this volume as heralding a movement beyond migration studies' traditionally singular research focus on the receiving context and processes of 'adaptation' and 'integration' towards an multiple focus designed to engage both the sending and receiving contexts and the important interactions between them. Contending that the distinguishing feature of *Between Two Cultures* was that "all contributors...had field experience at *both* ends of the migration chain", Watson argues that without such experience "it is impossible to gain a true picture of immigration as a *process*" (quoted in Hannerz 1998: 240, original italics).

Since then, multi-sited ethnography has been increasingly deployed in the study of spatial mobility. Hannerz (1998) ascribes this to the intensification and diversification of migrants' linkages with 'home' and the concomitant rise of 'migrant transnationalism' as a field of inquiry. Exploring how, and to what effect, these linkages bind sites of origin and destination in novel and more intimate ways, this burgeoning field absolutely relies on empirical engagements with both sending and receiving contexts (see for example: Glick Schiller et al 1992; Basch et al 1994; Portes 1997, 1999, 2001; Smith and Guarnizo 1998; Portes et al 1999; Roberts et al 1999; Vertovec and Cohen 1999; Vertovec 1999a, 2001; Levitt 2001; Orozco 2000, 2003, 2004; Riccio 2001, 2003; Orozco with Lapointe 2004; Caglar 2006; Portes et al 2007; Kleist 2008; Mazzucato 2008; Mazzucato and Kabki 2009). Indeed, Vertovec (1999a: 457) asserts that multi-sited ethnography is "essential to the study of transnationalism". Consequently, "the 'site' of fieldwork has become multiple and complex as everyday modes of communication allow easy contact between related peoples scattered throughout the world" (Hendry 2003: 500).

However, while multi-sited ethnography is crucial to understanding border-spanning processes such as migrant transnationalism it also raises important “methodological anxieties” (Marcus 1995: 99). Traditionally, ethnography requires a clearly defined, bounded, and localised ‘field’ in order to allow the focussed, sustained, and intimate interaction in which its descriptive and analytical power is grounded (Marcus 1995; Hannerz 1998; Hendry 2003). The quality and value of ethnographic knowledge is associated with being intensely involved at a single site, observing and participating for “twenty-four hours a day” over an extended period (D’Alisera 2004: 26-7; *ibid*). Consequently, distributing one’s attention over numerous sites potentially compromises the possibility of meeting “normal ethnographic standards” and having the “expected sense of deep involvement” (Hannerz 1998: 248).

Multi-sited ethnography therefore involves “testing the limits of ethnography” and risks “attenuating the power of fieldwork” (Marcus 1995: 99). Yet, for Marcus (1995: 96), it is impossible to avoid taking this risk because multi-sited ethnography “defines for itself an object of study that cannot be accounted for ethnographically by remaining focussed on a single site of intensive investigation”. Concordantly, Hannerz (1998: 248) asserts that “we need to experiment with the distribution of attention” and accept some trade-off between ‘dispersion’ and ‘intensity’, ‘depth’ and ‘breadth’ for “[i]nsisting on carrying out an entirely local study in a site strongly marked by translocal and transnational connections would surely not result in satisfactorily complete, deep ethnography either”.

Furthermore, the constant, all-encompassing surveillance implied in the classical understandings of ethnography may not be appropriate or possible given the nature and circumstances of multi-sited inquiry. Indeed, Hannerz (1998: 248) argues that the possibility of producing “complete ethnography”, involving the description of all aspects of a ‘community’ or ‘culture’, “now seems rather dubious” and that the definition of more feasible research problems, whether local or translocal in scope, often requires “more focussed attention on some phenomena than on others”. This assertion reflects Portes et al’s (1999: 218) concern that studies of migrant transnationalism often lack a clear conceptual focus and instead mix various levels of analysis, such as those pertaining to the individual, the ‘community’, and the state, in ways that “threaten to frustrate the viability of an otherwise promising topic of research”.



As analytical attention is distributed across space, attending to specific phenomena makes research more manageable not only in terms of narrowing conceptual scope, but also in that the study population can start to be defined and limited around particular networks such as families or professional groups (Hannerz 1998: 248). Reflecting the logic of Hannerz (1998) and the concern of Portes et al (1999), my research does not aim to comprehend in equal depth every aspect of the multitude of relations that might constitute a 'transnational community', but rather seeks to focus substantively on the specific sets of ties and linkages represented by diaspora organisations while, at the same time, recognising that these are embedded in wider socio-economic and cultural formations.

In addition to 'complete ethnography' potentially being impracticable in a multi-sited field, achieving the level of temporal intensity conventionally expected may also be problematic. As Hannerz (1998: 249) notes, "In some cases, the relationship between the temporalities of the researcher and the field also works out differently in transnational and multi-sited studies than in does in classical ethnography". In the latter case, he argues, the ethnographer is a transient among life-time residents of a site. Here, even an extended period of fieldwork is short in comparison to the involvement that the research subjects have with the site. While this may also be the case in a multi-sited study, "a combination of sites can include some where the ethnographer is not alone in being more or less footloose" (ibid). Furthermore, sites "may themselves be short-term phenomena" meaning that "the ethnographer may even be around for as long as the site lasts" (ibid). Hannerz (1998) lists sports events, conventions, and trade fairs as examples of such transitory sites, and one could add as further examples the meetings and events held by diaspora organisations.

Given the temporal variability of sites and the impracticability of doing 'complete ethnography' across a number of locations, Marcus (1995: 100) argues that "[m]ulti-sited ethnographies inevitably are the product of knowledge bases of varying intensities and qualities". Yet, for Marcus (ibid), this does not undermine their analytical potency: "To bring these sites into the same frame of study and to posit their relationships on the basis of first-hand ethnographic research in both is the important contribution of this kind of ethnography, regardless of the variability of the quality and accessibility of that

research at different sites”. If we accept that bringing multiple sites into the same frame of study is necessary and insightful, then we need to consider how this might be done.

Marcus (1995: 97) contends, “Strategies of quite literally following connections, associations, and putative relationships are...at the very heart of designing multi-sited ethnographic research”. More specifically, the strategies he suggests for constructing the field across and between various sites include, “follow the people” (employed most commonly in transnational migration studies), “follow the thing” (tracing the circulation of material objects, such as commodities, gifts, and money), “follow the metaphor” (located in the realm of discourse and modes of thought, this involves tracing the circulation of signs, symbols, and metaphors), and “follow the plot, story, or the allegory” (which, along with “follow the life or biography”, generates narratives to recount connections, associations, and relationships between sites).

As Marcus (1995) notes, following flows of people, things, and metaphors relies largely on identifying and tracing them in people’s narratives. Reflecting this, my research has a focus on utilising the personal narratives of members of diaspora organisations and people in Nigeria to identify and trace any flows of people, things, and metaphors that occur between these organisations and sites at ‘home’. Building on this, my research design also utilises opportunities to follow such flows myself by, for example, interacting with organised diasporans when they visit ‘home’ and attending organisations’ fundraising events in London and then visiting sites in Nigeria that receive the funds generated.

Responding to Marcus’ (1995) strategies, Hannerz (1998: 247) advocates that “the formulation multisited ethnography somewhat obscures an important fact: The research may need to be not merely multilocal but also translocal”. The implication here is that “parts of one’s ethnography may have to be *between* [...] sites, somehow deterritorialized. Serious effort must thus be devoted to an adequate conceptualisation and description of the translocal linkages” (ibid.). While, Marcus’ (1995) strategies clearly carry significant potential for comprehending these connections, Hannerz (1998) asserts that it is also necessary to explore relationships that are maintained across distance through new forms of communication technology. This is a pertinent point given that many scholars of migrant transnationalism cite the development of these technologies as a critical factor in enabling the expansion and intensification of migrants

border-spanning practices (see for example: Glick Schiller et al 1992; Basch et al 1994; Portes 1997, 1999, 2001; Smith and Guarnizo 1998; Portes et al 1999; Roberts et al 1999; Vertovec and Cohen 1999; Vertovec 1999a, 2001; Levitt 2001). Picking-up on Hannerz's (1998) idea, Hendry (2003: 500) argues that the regular electronic communication that exists within "communities separated geographically" means that ethnographers "may even carry out some [...] multi-sited research without leaving their computer screens".

Exemplifying this, Horst (2002) utilises Somali Internet sites and their electronic forums to generate valuable information and insights. She also complements her fieldwork data by maintaining contact with informants through email. This reflects Hannerz's (1998: 249) observation that the use of communication technologies by ethnographers means that "fieldwork goes on in some ways, even as [they] have absented themselves physically from their fields". For Hannerz (1998), this practice is one way in which researchers can attempt to counter the compromising of ethnographic intensity often involved in multi-sited studies. 'Cyberspace' and electronic communication technologies certainly play key roles in my research design and practice. Websites and Internet forums representing Nigeria and its constituent states and ethnic groups as well as those created by diaspora organisations themselves have been vital sources of data and contacts. Furthermore, email has been a critical means of initiating, maintaining and developing valuable research relationships with respondents in Nigeria and the UK- and US-based Nigerian diasporas.

### **Programme of research**

I turn now to the practical design and execution of my research. My fieldwork was conducted in three key stages:

- 1) A scoping study to identify, contact, profile and form preliminary research relationships with a wide range of London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations
- 2) A deeper ethnographic engagement with five case-study organisations selected from the scoping study
- 3) An ethnographic engagement with sites at which these five case-study organisations intervene in Nigeria

### *Stage 1: scoping study*

Conducted between March 2004 and March 2005, the central empirical aim of this stage of the research programme was to identify and gain an understanding of the basic characteristics, such as form, size, composition and activity focus, of as many London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations as possible. This responded primarily to my first research question, particularly in terms of giving greater analytical space to the various types of diaspora organisation that might exist.

In addition to this empirical objective, the scoping study also had the more pragmatic purpose of preparing the ground for the second and third stages of the research programme. Firstly, it enabled the construction of a sample frame of London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations from which the five case-study organisations could be selected for the deeper ethnographic engagement of the subsequent stages. Secondly, the scoping study was critical to initiating the research relationships and building the trust required for the second and third stages of the research.

#### *Identifying organisations*

Nine key channels were utilised to identify Nigerian diaspora organisations in London. As will become clear, some of these channels have inherent biases in terms of the types of organisation that they tend to lead to. Therefore, my use of multiple channels was designed to counter these biases and identify as wide a range of organisational forms and identities as possible. The nine key channels I used are:

- 1) The Internet: This channel generated the most potential contacts. Using search engines, I found many websites devoted to Nigeria and different Nigerian ethnic groups, regions, states, cities, towns and communities. Many of these websites are hosted in diasporic locations, predominantly in the United States. Whether hosted in Nigeria or in the diaspora, most of these sites contain references to, and useful information about, related organisations at 'home' and 'abroad' (particularly in the US). If these related organisations have websites of their own, links to these tend to be provided although they do not always function.

Through Internet search-engines, I was also been able to identify and access directly websites maintained by Nigerian diaspora organisations. The overwhelming majority of these websites represent state, ethnic, and hometown associations based in the US. However, some of these US-based websites give, or were able to provide upon enquiry, details of their 'sister' organisations in other parts of the world including London. Furthermore, it was possible to directly locate a number of websites created by London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations, and these often contained not only contact details but also much valuable information about the nature, composition, and activities of these organisations.

Together the different forms of website yielded references to 142 different London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations. However, it is important to note that these references did not always provide contact details and do not prove the current existence of the organisations identified – even where contact details were given, some of the organisations are no longer at the postal addresses given and some of the email accounts no longer function suggesting that the information contained on a number of websites is not up-to-date.

2) UK-published 'Black' and 'African' newspapers and directories: There are a number of such publications, the majority of which are taken and archived at The Africa Centre, London. In this archive, I found mention of, and contact details for, 19 London-based Nigerian organisations. As with those sourced from the Internet, not all of these contact details proved to be current.

3) London-based pan-African umbrella organisations: I wrote to the two most prominent and active of these groups, each representing a diverse network of organisations formed by London-based Africans, and they were willing and able to put me in contact with three London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations that I had not already contacted through other channels.

4) Member of Parliament: I wrote to a London MP whose constituency has a notable Nigeria-born population and who is noted for networking with London-based African communities. This MP was able to put me in contact with a prominent Nigerian 'community leader' and three London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations.

5) Councils for Voluntary Service (CVS): These organisations support and represent the ‘voluntary and community sector’ in local areas of the UK ([www.nacvs.org.uk](http://www.nacvs.org.uk)). I contacted the 33 borough-level Councils for Voluntary Service in London asking if they could give me the details of any African-run voluntary organisations in their respective areas. Most of the CVS responded although only a few had records of any such organisations. Unsurprisingly, these CVS represented boroughs with significant Africa-born populations. In total, this generated contact details for seven London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations that had not already been identified through other channels.

6) Nigeria High Commission, London: Motivated not only by the search for the details of organisations but also by an interest in the extent to which the Nigerian state attempts to engage the diaspora, I wrote to the Nigeria High Commission in London to enquire if they had any records of diaspora organisations based in the city. In response, the High Commission sent me a list of the contact details of ‘some’ of the UK-based Nigerian organisations they had on file. The list included 32 London-based diaspora organisations that I had not identified through other channels. Interestingly, 25 of these were state associations, each representing one of the 36 states that constitute the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Indeed, at one time it was these associations, grouped together under the umbrella of the Nigeria National Union, that were the main channel through which the High Commission maintained contact with the Nigerian diaspora and its organisations based on smaller geographical entities such as HTAs. However, it is widely reported that this system of networking has not operated effectively for some time. Indeed, many of the contact details on the High Commission list were no longer current and I received no responses from any of the contacts on the list.

7) London-based Nigerian umbrella organisations: The Nigeria National Union (NNU), founded in the 1960s, has traditionally been seen as the main body representing UK-based Nigerians. However, it is widely reported to have been paralysed by factionalism for some time. Indeed, I made contact with the two main factions of the NNU and while both were keen to assist me, neither was able to provide contact details for any other London-based Nigerian organisations. With a view to filling the void left by the effective demise of the NNU, a UK branch of the Nigerian government-initiated Nigerians in Diaspora Organisation Europe (NIDOE) was established in 2004 and the Central Association of Nigerians in the UK (CANUK) was established in late 2005.

Still in its infancy during the scoping study stage of my research, NIDOE UK is focussed more on collecting details of individual diasporic professionals than on operating as an umbrella for other Nigerian organisations. While CANUK is primarily an umbrella for other Nigerian organisations, it had not been formed at the time of my scoping study. However, I have since obtained the list of 44 organisations that constituted CANUK's founding membership, a few of which were not already on my scoping study database and were subsequently added.

8) UK Charity Commission's Register of Charities: This database includes all organisations that have registered as charities in the UK and is available online at <http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/>. The database includes fields such as charity name, country of operation and targeted groups. It is possible to search these fields using keywords. In this way, I was able to identify and obtain contact details for a further 50 London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations.

9) 'Snowballing': Many of the contacts I made through the channels detailed above were able to put me in contact with other organisations. Most notably, the leader of a diaspora organisation that I was able to contact through one of the channels above had produced a relatively up-to-date list of London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations. This list provided the contact details of 90 such groups, of which 65 were new to me having not been previously identified through other channels. While the list included organisations with links to a range of areas across southern Nigeria, it was predominated by those with links to places in and surrounding the Niger Delta, the region of origin of the list's author.

Other contacts made through the various channels outlined above provided me with the details of a further 45 organisations that I had not previously identified. Again, the new contacts tended to reflect the positionalities and particular socio-cultural networks of the respondents who provided them. For example, the 22 new organisations for which a Yoruba organisation provided contact details all represent Yoruba sub-groups and ancestral kingdoms. Similarly, the founder of another diaspora organisation I contacted is a highly successful professional and the two other organisations she provided contacts for were both associations of diasporic professionals. Furthermore, the more organisations I contacted, the more I became aware of particular venues at which London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations hold their meetings and/or events, such

as certain public halls and some well-known Nigerian-owned pubs and restaurants. This enabled me to visit these venues and meet more representatives and members of diaspora organisations, complementing the contacts I was also able to build through existing friends and acquaintances of Nigerian descent.

### *Engaging organisations*

Through the nine channels outlined above, I identified a total of 367 London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations and obtained contact details for 311 of these. I attempted to contact all of the organisations for which I had details, but in 38 cases my letter and/or email was returned because the address was incorrect or not current. Out of the replies I did receive, I had one negative response, two responses informing me that the organisation concerned was defunct, and 63 positive responses.

When making initial contact with organisations, I explained that I was conducting doctoral research on the work of Nigerian diaspora organisations in London both in terms of the functions they perform for their members and service-users in the UK and the contributions they make back in Nigeria. I traced my interest in the subject to the time I spent working at a university in Nigeria in 2000, when I became aware of some interventions that diaspora organisations had attempted to make at 'home'. I also detailed in my initial contact with organisations that I wanted my research to make a contribution to informing the growing academic, civil society, and policy interest in the role of diasporas and their organisations in development at 'home'. Requesting some insights into the basic characteristics and functions of the organisations I was able to contact, I suggested a number of different ways in which they could choose to initially participate in my research, namely by engaging in dialogue via letter, telephone, or email, completing a questionnaire either at distance or in person, and/or meeting for an informal interview.

Giving potential respondents an opportunity to enquire about the nature and purposes of my research and by making space for them to exert some influence over how and on what terms we might initiate interaction, this flexible approach to engagement was designed to encourage participation by reducing any suspicion and making people more comfortable about contributing. This strategy proved necessary as the participation of many respondents was clearly dependent on me providing further explanations of my



personal motives and my wider research objectives and methods. Furthermore, different respondents preferred to gain these explanations in different ways. Before agreeing to give me any information, some respondents wanted to question me in person or through extended email and telephone exchanges while others asked to be sent a questionnaire so that they could get a better idea of the types of question that I was interested in. In a number of cases, respondents had to report these exchanges back to their organisations and consult them on whether and how the group should participate. Reflecting this need to gain wider agreement on involvement, some respondents invited me to a meeting of their organisation so that I could present my research to, and field questions from, the assembled membership.

While some respondents and their organisations were happy to make an initial contribution by completing a questionnaire, most preferred to participate through more informal and open dialogue, whether at distance or in person. Consequently, basic profile information about different organisations has been obtained in different ways meaning that the nature of the data is not entirely consistent across the various cases. However, whichever method was employed, every effort was made to address the same key factors relating to the form, size, composition, aims, and activities of organisations. The central empirical aim of the scoping study was to gain a basic understanding of the characteristics of a range of organisations and it would have been difficult to gain any sort of insight into many of the organisations had my approach had an inflexible reliance on only one method.

Furthermore, I found that in comparison to questionnaire survey, the more natural and relaxed interaction and the greater scope for reciprocal questioning offered by informal dialogue was a far more effective way of putting respondents at ease, striking up a rapport, and building the trust that was so vital for the subsequent stages of my research. This was especially true when such dialogue took place in person. Consequently, I came to favour the use of face-to-face informal, semi-structured interviews as the method of initial engagement. Illustrating the kind of facilitating relationship that this method often brought into being, a number of the initial interviews led to me being invited to the meetings and events held by organisations thus allowing me to employ participant observation in the scoping study and to meet, engage in dialogue, and build trust with other members of the organisations concerned.

Some of the information generated through the initial informal, semi-structured interviews was recorded on tape with the consent of the interviewees, but in most cases I was meeting respondents for the first time and I felt that tape-recording could act as a barrier to forming the kind of relationship that would allow me to return for more insights in the future. If respondents provided information during these initial engagements, I obtained permission before noting it down during or immediately after the meeting. I emphasised to all participants that I would like to use in my research any information that I gained from questionnaires, informal dialogue and interviews, and participant observation. I made it clear that the participants could choose to withdraw any information at any point. I also committed to preserve the confidentiality and anonymity of all participants and their organisations unless given explicit permission to use real names.

Through the flexible utilisation of email and telephone dialogue, informal semi-structured face-to-face interviews, questionnaire survey, and participant observation, I was able to collect data about all 63 of the organisations that had responded positively to my initial enquiry. I was able to engage representatives of all of the organisations in email and/or telephone exchanges and 14 of the organisations completed questionnaires in person or through email or the post. Representatives of 12 of the organisations that completed questionnaires also gave informal semi-structured face-to-face interviews. Representatives of a further 38 organisations gave face-to-face interviews, meaning that, in total, I interviewed in person representatives of 50 London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations. Furthermore, 22 of these 50 organisations invited me to one of their meetings and/or events, enabling me to collect further data through participant observation. And data that had been collected from organisations' websites was supplemented substantially by documents, such as constitutions, minutes, annual reports, and publicity material, given to me by organisations engaged in the scoping study.

### ***Stage 2: A deeper ethnographic engagement with five case-study organisations in London***

Central to the entire project, this stage of the research responded to all three of my research questions and relied on selecting five of the organisations engaged in the scoping study as case-studies for more detailed, concentrated and sustained research

involving in-depth semi-structured interviews with members and supporters and participant observation at meetings and events. The stage of the research was initially conducted between March and June 2005 and continued again between January and July 2006. Contact with all of the organisations and many of the respondents engaged in this stage of the research continues to the present.

### *Selecting the five case-study organisations*

A variety of organisational identities and forms were identified in the scoping study, which, drawing on my data and existing literature on diaspora organisations around the world and associational life in Nigeria, can be classified into 8 key types. By far the most numerous of these are what I term, drawing on Bach (1997), 'geo-ethnic' organisations. These organisations are voluntary associations explicitly grounded in some form of sub-national ethno-spatial ancestral identity, ranging in scale from the likes of the 'village', 'hometown', 'kingdom', and 'clan' to wider formations such as the 'state', 'tribe' and 'ethnic nationality'. I employ Bach's (1997) term 'geo-ethnic' to describe these groups as it effectively captures the way in which, as we will see in Chapter 5, Nigerian ethnic identities tend to be deeply territorialised, being traced to defined and distinct spatial units of ancestral belonging. Furthermore, the term also highlights how place in Nigeria tends to be firmly ethnicised, with people 'originating' from specific 'hometowns', 'states', 'ethnic nations' and other territories often claiming, and being ascribed, particular subjective qualities, traits and characteristics and employing the resulting identity as a basis for collective action. Of the 367 London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations identified in the scoping study, 236 (64%) are geo-ethnic organisations. 22 of these are constituted exclusively by women and are termed geo-ethnic women's organisations.

The second most numerous type of diaspora organisation identified takes the form of the issue-based 'NGO' or 'charity', generally constituted by an individual founder with the backing of few trustees and supporters and focussing on a particular area or areas of work such as providing community support services in diaspora and/or undertaking health and education projects at 'home'. Of the 367 organisations identified, 64 (17%) take the form of diaspora NGOs. The third most numerous type of diaspora organisation identified is the voluntary association explicitly open to all Nigerians on the basis of national identity. These Nigerian associations are often formed in the context of

particular London neighbourhoods with notable Nigerian populations or represent 'umbrella' organisations claiming to represent all Nigerians and their associations in London or the UK in general. Of the 367 organisations identified, 24 (6.5%) take the form of national Nigerian associations.

The fourth most numerous type of diaspora organisation identified is the professional association. These organisations are voluntary associations formed by London- and UK-based Nigerian professionals in general or by those trained and/or working in specific professions, such as medicine, law, engineering, accountancy, academia, nursing, and information technology. I identified 17 of these organisations, constituting 4.6% of the 367 London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations identified in total. The fifth most numerous type of diaspora organisation identified is the religious association. In the case of organisations grounded in the Islamic faith, these groups are open to and claim to represent all London- and UK-based Nigerian Muslims. Religious associations grounded in the Christian faith, which is the faith of the substantial majority of UK-based Nigerians, tend to be formed in the more particular contexts of specific denominations, London neighbourhoods, and individual churches. 11 (3%) of the 367 organisations I identified are religious associations. The remaining organisations identified take the form of Nigerian student unions at London universities (3), London-based Nigerian sports clubs (4) and alumni associations formed by London- and UK-based former students of prestigious Nigerian schools (8).

Of the 63 London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations that responded positively to my initial enquiry and went on to participate in my scoping study, 32 are geo-ethnic organisations (including six geo-ethnic women's organisations), 18 are NGOs, 7 are professional associations, 3 are national associations, and 3 are religious associations. In selecting 5 of these organisations as case-studies for more detailed ethnographic research, I employed a purposive sampling strategy whereby organisations were selected in a way that represented as much diversity of organisational identity and form as possible. This reflects my key research aim to understand why, and with what implications for development at 'home', London-based Nigerians mobilise around different modes of identity and organisational form.

A further critical consideration when selecting the case-study organisations was the extent to which enabling research relationships had been created. Indeed, in some cases

my engagement with an organisation appeared to have gone as far as it was likely to go. For example, two organisational representatives who gave interviews were unable to secure on my behalf the consent of the leadership and wider membership of their organisations for the in-depth stage of the research. Similarly, while the representative of another organisation was able to get the leadership to complete a questionnaire, he was unable to gain their permission to be interviewed or to arrange for another representative to give an interview. Where enabling research relationships were formed in the scoping stage, it was where initial respondents had engaged strongly with the research and had been able to gain the enthusiastic consent of their fellow members for me to interact and conduct research with the group as a whole. I believed firmly that the deeper ethnographic engagement of stage two would absolutely depend on this kind of relationship being in place and I therefore felt that organisations with which such a relationship had been developed should be favoured in the sampling strategy.

Given these sampling criteria and realities, I selected the following five organisations from the 63 engaged in the scoping study:

- Ayege National Progress Union (ANPU), UK and Ireland branch: Originally formed in the 1960s, the latest incarnation of this classic example of a geo-ethnic diaspora organisation was established in the late 1980s. Popularly known as ANPU London, this organisation is constituted by 'indigenes' of the ancestral Yoruba kingdom of Ayege in rural southwest Nigeria.
- Ukpenwa Women's Association UK (UWA): Created in 1992, effectively as an offshoot of the main Ukpenwa Development Union UK and Ireland branch, this geo-ethnic women's organisation represents women hailing from the ancestral kingdom of Ukpenwa on the fringes of the Niger Delta in the southeast of Nigeria.
- Dr. Bassey Kubianga Education Trust (BKET): Established in 2004, this London-based NGO was founded in the memory of the late Dr Bassey Kubianga by his wife, three daughters and a few family friends. Popularly known as the BK Trust, the organisation works to promote health in Cross River State, Nigeria.
- Development Impact for Nigeria (DIFN): Founded in 1999 by Yomi Oloko and five of his London-based Nigerian friends, this diaspora NGO works to promote community development and health in and beyond the Ipaja district of Lagos.

- Engineering Forum of Nigerians (EFN): Formally launched in London in 2002, this diasporic professional association is constituted by UK-based Nigerian engineers and seeks to promote engineering education and development in Nigeria.

Together, these organisations represent different ways of mobilising around nationality, geo-ethnic belonging, gender, and socio-economic status and encompass different organisational forms from membership-based voluntary associations to issue-based NGOs. In so doing, these organisations not only highlight much of the diversity of the organised London-based diaspora but also represent some of the most important ways in which it is constituted. As such, these organisations provide a useful basis for better understanding some of the different and most significant means through which London-based Nigerians organise in diaspora and intervene collectively at ‘home’.

#### *In-depth, semi-structured interviews and document analysis*

Having selected the five case-study organisations, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with five members or supporters of each of the organisations. All of these 25 interviews were tape-recorded with consent and were between one and three hours in duration. Given that the size of the case-study organisations varies from six trustees and a few supporters in the case of DIFN to 200 or so members in the case of EFN, the interview sample was not proportional to membership. However, rather than constructing a statistically representative sample of each organisation, I employed a purposive sample designed to capture something of the diversity of positionalities found in and around each organisation. The aim was to generate a range of perspectives on the issues of interest and to facilitate an understanding of how motivations, experiences and perceptions might vary within and between organisations along the lines of age, gender, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, place of birth, level of involvement, and position in the organisation.

The interviews focussed on the following key topics:

- motivations for, and personal histories and experiences of, involvement in diasporic associational life
- perceptions of organisational aims, operation, functions, and effectiveness

- factors that affect organisational participation and capacity
- histories and experiences of living in London and the role, meaning, and significance of diasporic associational life in these
- attitudes towards, actual and desired relations with, and aspirations for Nigeria and the role, meaning, and significance of diasporic associational life in these
- organisations' transnational aspirations, activities, and modes of operation and the perceived meaning and effects of these at 'home'
- organisations' actual and potential relationships with other diaspora organisations, wider civil society, and the state

Information gleaned from the interviews about the case-study organisations was complemented significantly by members providing me with organisational documents, such as constitutions, minutes, project proposals, publicity material, and monthly and annual reports. To better understand the broader context of diasporic associational life and the relationship between the Nigerian state and London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations, I interviewed a representative of the Nigeria High Commission in London and a representative of each of the two 'umbrella' organisations officially recognised by the Nigerian state as representing the UK-based diaspora and its organisations, NIDOE UK and CANUK.

### *Participant observation*

Building on the participant observation conducted in the course of the scoping study, I attended the meetings and events held by the five case-study organisations throughout the duration of this stage of the research (March to June 2005 and January to July 2006). Attending the formal meetings of the organisations provided rich insights into the operation and activities of the organisations and presented an opportunity to gauge the nature and extent of participation. Attending the public events of the organisations, such as fundraising events and seminars, facilitated further insight into organisational operation and activities and enabled me to assess the extent to which the organisations are able to draw interest and participation from beyond the active core membership. Furthermore, these events were key to better understanding the ways in which the organisations attempt to present themselves and their activities and projects.

This second stage of participant observation not only produced a wealth of data in its own right but also enabled me to interact and build trust with the wider membership and support base of the organisations. This was critical to recruiting a range of interviewees representing something of the diversity of positionalities within and around the case-study organisations. Participation in organisational meetings and events also facilitated many informal but often very insightful conversations with members and supporters. In particular, participation at public events enabled me to meet and explore the often alternative perspectives of people who were not necessarily active members or supporters of the organisations. Furthermore, my regular participation in organisational activities meant that I came to know some members and supporters well enough to socialise with them beyond the realm of the organisations. This helped me to see their participation in the organisations in the context of their wider lives and also brought me into contact with many London-based Nigerians who had no active involvement in, but often strong and insightful opinions and assumptions about, the case-study organisations and other organisations like them.

***Stage 3: an ethnographic engagement with the sites at which the five case-study organisations intervene in Nigeria***

This stage of the research was centrally concerned with my second research question in that it aimed to explore any social, economic, political, and cultural effects that the five case-study organisations produce in Nigeria. It also responded to my third research question by seeking to understand from the perspective of 'home' the factors that influence the ability of diaspora organisations to intervene at 'home'. This stage of the research was executed during a six month period of fieldwork between June and December 2005. This fieldwork was devoted principally to conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and participant observation at the sites at which the five case-study organisations intervene in Nigeria. To complement and broaden this local case-study research, I also conducted semi-structured interviews with key, national-level academics, civil society activists, and government officials to whom the issue of collective diasporic intervention is of explicit or potential relevance. This was in turn complemented by participant observation at highly relevant state- and national-level civil society and government events, such as NGO conventions in Lagos and Cross River State and, most notably, the Federal Government's inaugural diaspora engagement conference in Abuja in June 2005.



### *In-depth, semi-structured interviews and document analysis*

At the sites at which the case-study organisations intervene in Nigeria, I selected and conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with respondents from four key groups. Firstly, local leaders such as ‘traditional rulers’, chiefs, religious and women’s leaders, heads of local professional bodies, and local and state government officials. Secondly, any local intermediaries through which the case-study organisations intervene in Nigeria. Thirdly, individuals and representatives of institutions that are the direct and/or intended beneficiaries of the case-study organisations’ interventions. And lastly, a diverse selection of members of the public at the sites of intervention who have not been directly engaged or benefitted directly from the activities of the case-study organisations.

In total, I conducted 81 in-depth, semi-structured interviews at the sites of intervention, the vast majority of which were tape-recorded and all of which addressed the following key issues:

- the extent to which local individuals and institutions are involved by the case-study organisations in the formulation, implementation, and management of interventions
- the impacts that the interventions have
- who it is that benefits from the interventions
- the sufficiency, appropriateness, and effectiveness of the interventions
- the extent to which the interventions reinforce or challenge local power structures, practices, values, and ideas
- the attitudes of local individuals and institutions to the case-study organisations, their members, and the organised diaspora in general
- the importance of the interventions relative to those made by other actors such as other diaspora organisations and individuals, local civil society, and the state

Data collected through these interviews was augmented greatly by obtaining access to highly relevant documents at the sites of intervention. For example, both DIFN and the BK Trust maintain offices in Nigeria and I was granted free access to the files kept there. Similarly, the ‘traditional authorities’ of Ayege allowed me to access the

communal archive they maintain, which contains community newsletters, publications, and financial accounts that provide incredibly valuable insights into communal projects supported by the kingdom's citizens and associations at 'home' and 'abroad'.

### *Participant observation*

Building on interviews and document analysis, I conducted intensive participant observation at the sites of intervention in Nigeria, most notably during programmes, activities and events initiated and/or supported by the case-study organisations such as the HIV/AIDS awareness seminars and summer youth camp held by DIFN and the inter-school health debate organised by the BK Trust. As noted above, both of these organisations maintain an office in Nigeria and these were key sites of sustained participant observation. In Ayege, I was able to witness the daily workings of the kingdom's 'traditional authorities' and, of key importance, the annual Ayege Day festival which is designed to attract 'sons and daughters' from 'home' and 'abroad' to make individual and collective donations to the community development fund.

Furthermore, in the course of living and working in and around the sites of collective transnational intervention, I came to meet and know many people who were keen to offer their opinions on the role of diaspora in local development whether or not they had any connection to, or knowledge of, the case-study organisations and their work. This provided a wealth of insights into the ways in which the diaspora and its organisations are perceived at 'home'. Moreover, I was constantly made aware of alternative individual and institutional actors working to 'bring development' and this helped me to better understand and contextualise the contribution of the organised diaspora.

### **Conclusion**

Responding to the need to subject to greater empirical assessment the positing of diaspora organisations as powerful and positive actors in the progress of 'home', this chapter has set out the research design, methods, and data through which this thesis attempts to identify how and with what effects London-based Nigerians organise in diaspora and intervene at 'home'. This programme of research has served to highlight the different ways in which the London-based Nigerian diaspora is organised, including not only the 'hometown associations' emphasised in much work on migrant

transnationalism but also a variety of other geo-ethnic organisations such as 'clan', 'state', and 'tribal' unions as well as groups taking alternative forms such as issue-based NGOs and professional associations. The programme of research described in this chapter has also facilitated the selection of five-case study organisations that highlight much of this diversity and yet also represent some of the most important ways in which the London-based Nigerian diaspora is organised. Drawing on the empirical data generated through this research programme, the following chapters explore how and to what extent London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations, in their various forms, contribute to development at 'home'.

***Part 2: entanglements of power – diaspora organisations  
and the transnational politics of identity and  
development***

## **4. Collective diasporic intervention and the transnational politics of socio-economic status and gender**

### **Introduction**

As we saw in Chapter 2, diaspora organisations are being lauded globally as new development actors that constitute a much more direct and participatory mode of international assistance, channelling financial, material and intellectual resources to the most needy in communities and countries of origin. In so doing, diaspora organisations and their transnational interventions are seen not only to provide direct benefits to recipients but also to reconfigure established power relations at 'home' in ways that are deemed developmentally beneficial. In these celebratory, globalising discourses of diaspora and development steeped firmly in 'western' liberal notions of progress, diaspora organisations are especially lauded for reaching, benefiting and 'empowering' women and 'the poor' at 'home'. In this way, diaspora organisations are seen to further key strategic objectives in hegemonic visions of international development such as alleviating poverty, promoting the rights of women and generally reducing gender and socio-economic inequality.

However, we also saw in Chapter 2 that such celebrations are based on rather limited evidence and could therefore be open to question. Indeed, in the case of London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations, it appears that the connection of diaspora groups to women and 'the poor' at 'home' is not necessarily 'empowering' and, at best, rather ambivalent. In this chapter I argue that while members of such groups generally aspire to 'help the poor' at 'home', the collective transnational contributions that they attempt to make tend to be directed through local elite individuals and institutions, limiting the direct benefit felt by 'the grassroots' and potentially reinforcing rather than reducing established socio-economic inequalities. Furthermore, I contend that London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations often appear to reproduce rather than transform established, and what might be seen as patriarchal, gender roles and relations and rarely express any kind of radical transnational desire to 'empower' women at 'home'. Consequently, I suggest that if national governments and international agencies are to engage constructively with these diaspora groups, it will be necessary for globalising discourses of diaspora and development to recognise the alternative and socially

mediated ways in which ‘progress’ might be imagined and practiced in diaspora and at ‘home’.

**Between ‘grassroots’ empowerment and elite interests: collective diasporic intervention and the transnational politics of socio-economic status**

*“We cannot be here and do nothing when our people are suffering back home”<sup>1</sup>: diasporic desires and ‘the grassroots’*

As globalising discourses of diaspora and development would hope, many if not most London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations explicitly frame the interventions they attempt to make in Nigeria as being intended to benefit ordinary people, popularly referred to as ‘the grassroots’. For example, the Chairman of an Egba-Yoruba ‘hometown association’ argues that its transnational objective is “to support the community at the grass root level” (Interview, London, May 2005). Similarly, the director of the diaspora NGO Nigerian Women for Development (NWD) contends that the organisation is “working in the Niger Delta to empower grass root women and their families” (NWD document, 2004). Furthermore, within the ‘grassroots’, it is very often the ‘poor’, ‘disadvantaged’ and ‘less privileged’ that are specifically targeted. For example, the London-based Dr Bassey Kubianga Education Trust (BKET) is “committed to alleviating social and economic disadvantage in Cross River State” (BKET document, n.d.) and a UK-based association of Nigerian nurses aspires “to relieve poverty and distress by the provision of practical contributions to the delivery of healthcare” (Organisation document, n.d.).

Significantly, organisational objectives such as these are often grounded in and reflect deeply held diasporic desires to reach and assist from afar ‘the grassroots’ at ‘home’, especially its most vulnerable members. In turn, these heart-felt transnational aspirations tend to be traced to personal experiences of poverty and hardship at ‘home’. For example, in reflecting on his reasons for founding the diaspora NGO Development Impact for Nigeria (DIFN), Mr Yomi Oloko highlights how he is committed to “helping the poor” at ‘home’ because he came to know “hunger and poverty” while working as a low and infrequently paid teacher in Nigeria during the 1980s (Interview, London, July 2005). Similarly, a stalwart of the Ayege National Progress Union (ANPU), London

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<sup>1</sup> Ukpenwa Women’s Association member, interview, London, April 2005

branch, argues that he is a strong advocate of the organisation funding scholarships for needy schoolchildren at 'home' because he was himself once a disadvantaged pupil in the ancestral kingdom; "I know what a student goes through there, especially when they are from a poor family which I was as well" (Interview, London, July 2005).

Even the many organised diasporans who have enjoyed relatively 'comfortable' conditions at 'home' often highlight indirect experiences of poverty and disadvantage that have compelled them to contribute individually and collectively to 'home'. Recalling the visits he used to make to Ayege when he was growing-up in a prosperous Lagos-based family in the 1970s, an executive of ANPU London states:

I feel strongly that I have to give something back to that environment because even though I didn't grow-up there per se, I experienced it a lot and I feel they are still very, very far behind and it doesn't give me any happiness to know that. I mean, [...], most of us here have everything at our fingertips but there are people there who have nothing. (Interview, London, June 2005)

Similarly, in explaining his motivations for founding a diaspora NGO to improve healthcare access for the "poorest of the poor" at 'home', Mr Uzoma emphasises his deep desire to counter the "poverty and suffering" he has witnessed in his ancestral community since it was devastated in the Biafran War (Interview, London, May 2005).

Mr Uzoma also emphasises that those suffering in poverty at 'home' are his "brothers, sisters, cousins, nephews" (ibid). Indeed, extended family affinities and ties mean that even organised diasporans with relatively privileged backgrounds often identify strongly with, and seek to benefit, 'the grassroots' and 'the poor'. As Mr Ade Fashade, a founding trustee of the diaspora NGO DIFN, explains:

I'm lucky, I've come from a fairly comfortable background really, compared to the majority so I didn't really have those issues [of poverty]. But I had an awareness of it around me because the thing with Nigeria is, no matter where you come from, even if you are from the most privileged background in the country, you will still come across poverty and you will probably know somebody who is poor, there is always that connection, [...], if not within your immediate family, then because of the system of the extended family in Nigeria, the extended family could be poor and they will come to your house anyway. So you saw it around you, so you weren't immune from it, [...], that is what gives us that kind of awareness, that 'the fact that

this is around me, what can we be doing about it?' (Interview, London, July 2006)

Illustrating just how strong this awareness can be, an executive of the Ukpenwa Women's Association UK (UWA) reports, "Even though I'm living here, I can't stop thinking about my extended family at home. Every time I eat breakfast or lunch I am thinking, 'are they able to eat this?'" (Interview, London, May 2005). As Mrs Ademola asserts in accounting for her committed membership of ANPU London, "I have brother back home, I have sister, I have cousin, I have so many people back home, I want them to live comfortable" (Interview, London, April 2006).

Deeply grounded in personal experiences and familial bonds, diasporic desires to 'help' 'the grassroots', 'the poor' and 'the disadvantaged' at 'home' are manifest in many collective transnational interventions. For example, the UWA has made material donations to an orphanage, the public library and two public hospitals in Ukpenwa and in 2004 the association awarded a scholarship to a local schoolgirl from a 'poor' family. Similarly, ANPU London has contributed to Ayege's communal scholarship, security and development funds, sent books to the kingdom's community library and made donations to a "handicapped Ayege indigene"<sup>2</sup> and a local victim of an acid attack. And as a diaspora NGO, Nigeria Action has carried out urgent repairs and sent exercise books to two public schools in 'disadvantaged' communities in Nigeria.

***"They can often work for the benefit of the haves"<sup>3</sup>: local intermediaries and elite interests***

While many collective transnational interventions appear to reflect deeply held diasporic desires to benefit and empower the 'grassroots', especially 'the poor' and 'the deprived', many others seem to attend primarily to the desires and interests of local elites. Indeed, as much as diaspora organisations often make contributions to the needy and to public health and education, they often also support the established power and authority of elite individuals and institutions. For example, diaspora organisations grounded in geo-ethnic identities generally recognise, respect and reinforce the 'traditional authorities' of their ancestral homelands. This is most evident in the

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<sup>2</sup> Ayege Progress Committee document, 1995.

<sup>3</sup> President of an Ijesha-Yoruba 'hometown association' on community development committees in Nigeria, interview, London, April 2005.



tendency of such groups to contribute to the construction, maintenance and improvement of palaces and other prominent markers of 'traditional' authority at 'home', such as 'customary' court and parliament buildings and statues of ancestral rulers.

Furthermore, many geo-ethnic diaspora organisations recognise, work through and make donations to community development associations run by 'traditional' and 'educated' elites at 'home'. While these 'home'-based institutions generally oversee the financing and execution of communal 'self-help' projects such as the building and repair of public schools and hospitals, they are widely viewed in the literature as often operating as self-serving platforms for local elites to create and consolidate power bases, accumulate status and resources, and access positions and patronage in the clientalistic Nigerian state (Ahanotu 1982; Muoghalu 1986; Adejunmobi 1990; Barkan et al 1991; Vaughan 1995, 2000; Osaghae 1994, 1995; Honey and Okafor 1998; Trager 1998; Ikelegbe 2001; Abbott 2002; Ukiwo 2003, 2005). For example, Aguda's (1998: 24) study of a Yoruba town development union concludes that the organisation "is run not only by, but also for, the élite". Indeed, Honey and Okafor (1998: 149) conclude that such organisations are "a conservative force" and "tend to maintain" not only infrastructure but also "privilege".

Certainly, the Ayege Progress Committee (APC), the 'home'-based parent body of ANPU London, is often seen to be dominated by, and to serve the interests of, local elites. The APC is regarded as the 'apex' Omoyege organisation and is charged with leading Ayege's quest for progress. As such, the APC coordinates the kingdom's 'self-help' initiatives and receives and deploys communal contributions from Omoyege individuals and organisations at 'home' and 'abroad'. Significantly, the APC's status at the head of Omoyege 'communal effort' derives directly from its elevated position in both 'traditional' and 'modern' hierarchies of power. Firstly, the organisation is an inherent component of Ayege's 'traditional authorities'; not only is it formally constituted as the 'executive arm' of the Oba and his council of chiefs but it is also chaired by one of the kingdom's six high chiefs and its three other executives, the Vice Chairman, Treasurer and General Secretary, are all chiefs. Secondly, the APC executives, like the Oba and most of his council of chiefs, are widely recognised not only as 'traditional elites' but also as 'educated elites'. Indeed, the high chief who chairs the APC is a highly educated and experienced technocrat who had attained a senior

position in the United Nations in Europe prior to retiring to Ayege in the late 1980s. Similarly, in addition to being chiefs, the APC's Vice Chairman is a retired university professor and its General Secretary is a well-educated former civil servant.

Dominated by 'traditional' and 'educated' elites, the APC is often seen to prioritise the particular interests and desires of these groups. Since the late 1970s it has, indeed, devoted the bulk of the communal funds it has accrued to three major projects, each of which is widely seen to be of primary benefit to elites. By far the biggest of these 'headline' projects is the construction of a 'befitting' town hall for Ayege. Having consumed some N40 million (c.US\$300,000/£180,000<sup>4</sup>) since it was initiated in 1986, this imposing 'edifice' is designed and utilised principally for "prestigious"<sup>5</sup> occasions that are routinely considered to be distinctly elite affairs. These include 'hosting' visiting dignitaries (especially government officials), holding lavish social events such as big wedding parties and, most important of all, celebrating the annual Ayege Day fundraising festival, the key targets of which are Omoyege individuals and associations that can afford to make significant donations to the communal development fund administered by the APC.

The second 'headline' project undertaken by the APC in recent years is the construction between 1999 and 2003 of a new, 'ultra-modern' palace for the Oba. Costing in excess of N12 million (c.US\$90,000/£55,000<sup>6</sup>), this impressive royal complex was built explicitly to provide Ayege's first highly educated monarch with a 'befitting' level of 'comfort' and status. The third major activity the APC has pursued since the late 1970s is for many in the community an equally elite-oriented endeavour. Over the last 30 years or so, the APC has spent "colossus" sums "defending the territorial integrity of the kingdom" (APC document, 2005), contesting through the courts and the state the 'encroachment' of 'Ayege land' by neighbouring kingdoms. This extremely costly exercise is widely seen to be of primary benefit to the community's elites, especially its 'traditional' leaders, popularly known as 'babas' or 'elders', because they are by far the biggest owners of 'Omoyege' land.

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<sup>4</sup> These figures are based on the average exchange rates for 2003, the year in which the APC issued this estimate.

<sup>5</sup> APC General Secretary, interview, Ayege, November 2005.

<sup>6</sup> See note 4.

Indeed, leadership of the APC is often seen to provide the kingdom's 'babas' with opportunities to consolidate and develop their own economic and political power. For example, when in the mid-1990s the APC paid the Ondo State Government in excess of N300,000 (c.US\$9,500/£6,000 (1995)) to purchase a large area of land with the purported intention of dividing it into plots for subsidised resale to any interested Omoyeges, there were widespread suspicions and accusations in the kingdom that the land was, in practice, simply "shared among elders" (APC document, 2002). Similarly, some in the community note with no little cynicism that the kingdom's 'apex' body is a major investor in the community bank founded by the APC chairman and other 'elders' in 1992. It is also suggested that by virtue of running both the APC and Ayege's community bank, the 'apex' body's chairman was able to ensure his appointment in 2004 as the chairman of the Ondo State Government's Ayege/Asiki Community Development Committee, a position in which he oversees and dispenses a budget of some N10million.

Furthermore, it is bemoaned by some that in apparently serving the interests and ambitions of 'educated' and 'traditional' elites, the APC neglects the most pressing needs and desires of the wider community, especially the 'grassroots'. A common complaint is that the APC has been so consumed with contesting land disputes and completing the town hall that it has done little in recent years to support the kingdom's public schools, most of which express desperate needs for repairs, equipment and books. Many 'citizens' express even greater frustration that the APC appears to have made no tangible effort to restore to the kingdom pipe-borne water, a reliable electricity supply or a telephone connection. It is decried that unlike the elites, most 'citizens' cannot afford to sink boreholes, buy generators or purchase mobile phones that can be used on travels beyond the kingdom. By far the greatest complaint, however, is that the APC has done precious little to create or improve livelihood opportunities for 'ordinary' Omoyeges, especially those enduring widespread underemployment or unemployment and the many small-scale farmers who struggle to eke out an existence in the face of high input costs, a lack of equipment and low produce prices.

***“In tune with the wishes and aspirations of the people”: towards ‘grassroots’ benefit and ‘empowerment’***

Despite all the criticism and frustration that the APC generates by appearing to prioritise elite interests and ambitions over ‘grassroots’ needs and desires, the ‘apex’ body still receives notable respect and even praise for attempting to ‘bring development’ to the kingdom in ways that are seen to benefit the ‘citizenry’ as a whole. Although the town hall and palace constructed by the APC are widely seen as principally for the ‘comfort’ and enjoyment of elites, a broad cross section of Omoyeges are immensely proud of these ‘edifices’ and see them as raising the status and profile of the kingdom and its chances of attracting the attention and benevolence of the state. Furthermore, ‘indigenes’ have been given opportunities to undertake much of the construction work for these and other APC ‘building projects’.

Similarly, while the APC’s Ayege Day fundraising event is often seen as an elite affair, most Omoyeges assert that its role in accumulating resources from elites at ‘home’ and ‘abroad’ is important to the development of the kingdom. Additionally, it is widely noted that by bringing ‘home’ Omoyeges based beyond the kingdom, the week-long festival creates economic benefits for local transport workers, traders, musicians and dance troupes. And while there is frustration that the APC has not utilised the communal funds generated at Ayege Day to undertake significant employment generation or infrastructure construction projects, it is generally acknowledged that such major interventions may well be beyond the means of the ‘apex’ body. In this context, there is much appreciation for the APC’s efforts to lobby the state to create jobs and improve infrastructure in the kingdom.

Furthermore, it is widely recalled that elite-led ‘self-help’ has, in the past at least, executed projects that have been oriented to the benefit of the community as a whole. Most notably, it is enthusiastically recounted that, in the 1950s, the APC’s predecessor, ANPU ‘home-branch’, constructed the kingdom’s first secondary school and, during the course of the 1970s, the APC itself established the kingdom’s first two hospitals. Officially taken over by the state soon after completion, the two hospitals have fallen into disrepair on a number of occasions only for the APC to step back in and carry out renovations. And the latest ‘headline’ initiative proposed by the APC, the construction of a polytechnic in Ayege, is strongly endorsed with many believing it will widen

access to much sought after higher education by charging reasonable fees and by negating transport and accommodation costs associated with attending institutions beyond the kingdom. For example, market women and drivers of motorcycle taxis or 'okada' generally appear to see the polytechnic project not only as potentially bringing them more business but also as enabling them to fulfil their own educational ambitions.

It is therefore with some foundation that the APC Chairman claims that the 'apex' body is "in tune with the wishes and aspirations of the people" (APC document, 2002). Indeed, the APC and the 'traditional authorities' in general do afford space for 'grassroots' participation. All 'sons and daughters' of Ayege are automatically members of the APC and it holds monthly public meetings. While these gatherings tend to attract only 20-30 people, representatives of what are generally seen to be 'grassroots' interests, such as market traders, do participate, especially when there is an issue of particular concern to them. Furthermore, a 'traditional parliament' is held every nine days. This occasion extends over two days, the first involving the Oba and his six high chiefs meeting with senior second and third class chiefs who are expected to represent the "complaints and opinions" of "the people" (APC document, 1994). On its second day, the parliament proceeds to the palace courtyard where in excess of a 100 'citizens' gather in the presence of the Oba and his chiefs to hear the decisions taken the previous day. The 'citizens' present are expected to communicate the news to those not in attendance. 'Citizens' are also expected to channel any responses or issues they might have through the chief who represents the area of the kingdom in which they reside.

Additionally, the leaders of local social, trade, cooperative, women's, youth, and religious associations are regularly called for meetings with the APC, especially when there are pressing issues or major initiatives to be discussed. Significantly, the leaders of such organisations generally feel that they are listened to when they attend these meetings. Moreover, the Oba and all the classes of chief are also open to the everyday concerns of 'citizens'. On most evenings, the Oba can be found resting in the palace compound and 'ordinary' 'citizens' often drop by for advice on everything from paternity disputes to getting hospital treatment. The six high chiefs each have responsibility for an area of the main town and receive in their compounds residents seeking counsel on a multitude of matters from noisy neighbours to travelling 'abroad'. The consultation of chiefs often relates to disputes in the community and these can be

passed up the 'traditional' hierarchy for resolution until they reach the highest authority at the Oba's weekly 'peace meeting'.

Beyond those afforded by the 'traditional authorities', opportunities to voice 'grassroots' concerns and interests are also carved out by 'the people' themselves. This is especially apparent in the case of the kingdom's 'youth', a social category defined not so much by age but rather by the condition of not being socio-economically 'established' (Gore and Pratten 2003; Nolte 2004). As the social group that is seen to be most affected and frustrated by widespread unemployment and with little opportunity to enter a 'traditional' political hierarchy built largely on success and status, the 'youth' often find it necessary to agitate strongly for their interests to be recognised. With Ayege's 'youth' having become well organised in recent years, the Oba's personal assistant contends, "[...S]ome of the things the elders have turned a deaf ear to, the youth can say, 'Come baba, do this thing for these people'" (Interview, Ayege, December 2005). And the leader of the kingdom's umbrella 'youth' association is pleased to report that the 'babas' are now more willing to listen. Indeed, when there were not such good lines of communication between the 'elders' and the 'youth', the latter often found it necessary to engage in protest, once even marching on the palace and threatening to burn it down. Clearly, the APC and the 'traditional authorities' as a whole are not in a position to disregard completely the interests and desires of 'the grassroots'.

While ANPU London's connection with the 'ordinary' people it expresses a desire to benefit at 'home' is rather heavily mediated through an elite-led and, in many ways, elite-orientated communal apparatus, some UK-based Nigerian diaspora organisations have been able to identify local intermediaries through which they can connect more directly with the 'grassroots' and their interests. With the aim of making "a positive difference to the lives of the less privileged"<sup>7</sup> and working principally in the generally poor and marginalized Lagos district of Ipaja, the diaspora NGO Development Impact for Nigeria (DIFN) recruited as its 'home'-based programme coordinator an experienced local community worker highly regarded for his contributions to 'grassroots' health and development. The community worker, Pastor Olabode Omokaro, or 'Bode' as he prefers to be known, grew up in the 'tough' Mushin area of Lagos and has lived in Ipaja, Lagos for the last 15 years. While Bode is respected in his community

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<sup>7</sup> DIFN document, n.d..

of residence as an ordained pastor and highly educated man (he holds a postgraduate certificate in community development from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria's most prestigious university), he is very much seen as 'a man of the people' who is 'close to the grassroots'.

Bode first established this recognised connection with Ipaja's 'grassroots' through his work with the Red Cross, of which he has been a member since secondary school. As a senior district official of the organisation, Bode has become well-known for his highly-visible role in coordinating the local teams that go from house to house in national immunisation programmes. Furthermore, Bode is widely praised for mobilising his local church and some retired nurses to establish in 1995 a 'mother and baby clinic' for the many young women in the area who, despite combining petty trading with motherhood, cannot afford to access advice, immunisations and medicines at Ipaja's rather limited 'public' health facilities.

Indeed, when in 1999 Bode mentioned the popularity of the clinic at DIFN's first community health conference in Nigeria, the organisation's founder decided to pay a visit and, impressed with what he saw, appointed Bode as DIFN's Nigeria programme coordinator. With Bode joining the organisation, DIFN has been able to channel resources directly to an individual who enjoys not only enabling connections and respect among local 'traditional' elites and government officials but also a strong and mutually much cherished relationship with Ipaja's 'grassroots'. Consequently, Bode has been able to help DIFN's founders realise their deeply-held diasporic desires to reach and 'empower' 'the grassroots', organising community development and HIV/AIDS awareness seminars at local churches, introducing the Child-to-Child Health Approach to local primary and secondary schools, providing counselling and support for people living with HIV/AIDS and establishing skills training programmes for young mothers and unemployed 'youth'.

However, while it is clear that diaspora organisations can connect with, benefit and possibly even 'empower' 'ordinary' people at 'home' as globalising discourses of diaspora and development might hope, it is also clear that many such groups do so through local institutional intermediaries that are dominated by elites and tend to prioritise their interests and reinforce their positions. This is particularly true of that majority of diaspora organisations, including ANPU London, that are grounded in geo-

ethnic identities. When these groups engage a local intermediary at 'home', it is generally some form of communal development committee or union, a type of institution that is widely seen by respondents and in the literature as little more than an often rather blatant vehicle for elite benefit and ambition. The local institutional intermediaries engaged by some diaspora NGOs and professional associations, such as state and federal government ministries and 'home'-based professional bodies, are routinely seen in the very same light. The relationship and benefit of diaspora organisations to the poor and disadvantaged is therefore rather more ambivalent than globalising discourses of diaspora and development might hope.

**“Women are home makers”<sup>8</sup>: collective diasporic intervention and the transnational politics of gender**

***“I would rather prefer my husband to go”: diasporic associational life and the transnational reproduction of gender roles and relations***

In addition to contending that diaspora organisations reach and benefit 'the grassroots', globalising discourses of diaspora and development often posit that such groups encourage the development and transnational transmission of new and supposedly more 'liberatory' notions of womanhood, 'empowering' women and countering gender inequality both in diaspora and at 'home' (Levitt 1997, 1998; Burton 2004; Gammage 2004; Osirim 2008; Landolt and Goldring 2009). However, London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations, like many migrant associations discussed elsewhere<sup>9</sup>, appear to do more to reproduce rather than transform the established, and what might be seen as rather patriarchal, gender roles and relations of 'home'.

This can be seen most clearly in the case of geo-ethnic diaspora organisations that open their membership to both men and women. Mirroring what the literature<sup>10</sup> and respondents in diaspora and at 'home' often see as a characteristic of ethnicised associations in Nigeria, the active participation of women in London-based geo-ethnic diaspora organisations tends to be limited, both in terms of the nature and degree of involvement. For instance, an executive of ANPU London reports that it is “mostly

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<sup>8</sup> Female Patron of the Ukpemwa Women's Association UK, interview, Ukpemwa, November 2005.

<sup>9</sup> See for example: Joly 1987; AFFORD 1998; Liu 1998; Mahler 1998; Popkin 1999; Uduku 2000; Jazeel 2006.

<sup>10</sup> See for example: Barnes 1975; Amadiume 1987; Barkan et al 1991; Honey and Okafor 1998; Ikelegbe 2005a; van den Bersselaar 2005; Nolte 2008.



men” who attend the association’s monthly meetings (Interview, London, May 2005). Indeed, of the 15 or so members who attend regularly, only three are women. Both male and female members assert that this is not a result of women being in any way unwelcome to attend and voice their opinions. Indeed, one of the women who attends regularly is one of the most vociferous participants at meetings and argues that she is continuing a strong tradition of Omoyege women being “very vocal” (Interview, London, July 2005). “Ayege women are tough”, she contends, “so they can put their men in their place. They’re not like some other cultures where the woman can’t even open their mouth!”

Rather than any notion that women should not participate in the associational meetings in London, their limited involvement is traced primarily to practical constraints and what are considered to be the responsibilities of motherhood. As meetings are held late on Saturday evenings (to accommodate members’ work commitments) and in members’ homes (for want of the funds to hire a hall), it is argued that the time and limited space of the gatherings precludes members from bringing along any young children they might have. Explicitly drawing on what is seen as the established gender division of labour, it is asserted by male and female members alike that it is the role and duty of the mother to stay at home to care for any young children while the father attends the meetings. Indeed, ANPU London member Mrs Ademola proclaims that she much prefers to concentrate on “the commitment in the house” than attend the association’s meetings (Interview, London, April 2006). “I would rather prefer my husband to go”, she adds, explaining that she is very happy for him to pay her dues on her behalf and represent her and the family as a whole. Furthermore, highlighting that women attend, make donations at, and prepare food for the major fundraising cultural events that the association aspires to hold annually, she argues, “Our women folk can support in different ways for the progress of the union and for the community”.

***“It’s a mother’s nature”<sup>11</sup>: diasporic women’s organisations and the reproduction of gendered discourses of ‘care’ and ‘dynamism’***

A key way in which diasporic women seek, and are seen, to contribute to their communities at ‘home’ and ‘abroad’ is by forming their own organisations. Women’s organisations are widely considered a well-established element of associational life in

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<sup>11</sup> Ukpenwa Women’s Association UK member, interview, London, April 2006.

Nigeria<sup>12</sup>, especially in the southern half of the country, and their formation in diaspora is routinely seen simply as a reproduction of this conventional practice rather than any sort of novel trend aimed at reconfiguring conventional gender norms in favour of women. Furthermore, and reflecting what the literature<sup>13</sup> and respondents at ‘home’ and ‘abroad’ often see as a feature of women’s organisations in Nigeria, diaspora organisations formed by and for women generally appear to have little desire to transform established gender roles and relations. As a founding and still highly committed member of the Ukpenwa Women’s Association UK (UWA) exclaims, “It’s nothing to do with women’s rights!” (Interview, London, June 2006).

Indeed, like other diasporic geo-ethnic women’s organisations, the establishment of the UWA is framed simply in terms of creating a social space in which members can pursue desires and employ abilities that are seen to be traditionally associated with women. The key factor for many members is a yearning to socialise in ways that are considered to be of particular interest or enjoyment to women. As a founding member and current executive of the UWA contends, “[...T]he women came together because we felt we could relax a little bit more when we are in each other’s company, there are certain activities you would do more as women than if you are having a team of men being there” (ibid). Among the activities detailed are openly discussing women’s health issues, learning crafts and enjoying particular forms of humour. Indeed, there is a strong emphasis on having “fun” in the absence of men (ibid). “As all women”, a committed UWA member enthuses, “we relax, we chill out, we are happy, we sing songs, maybe things we would dare not sing when are men are there!” (Interview, London, April 2006). Furthermore, members take particular pleasure and pride in organising ‘traditional’ wedding ceremonies and recreating recipes from Ukpenwa’s celebrated cuisine, thereby reproducing defining elements of Ukpenwa culture that are very much seen as the preserve of women.

In accounting for the formation of diasporic geo-ethnic women’s organisations such as the UWA, members of these groups also emphasise what is widely seen both at ‘home’ and abroad as the greater desire and ability of women to organise effectively for communal benefit. With explicit reference to prevailing gender norms drawn from

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<sup>12</sup> See also Ottenberg 1955; Barnes 1975; Mba 1982; Enabulele 1985; Amadiume 1987, 2000; Denzer 1994; Imam 1997; Olukoshi 1997; Honey and Okafor 1998; Enemuo and Momoh 1999; Pereira 2000; Ikelegbe 2001a, 2005a; Trager 2001; Ukeje 2004; Chuku 2005, 2009; van den Bersselaar 2005; Nolte 2008.

<sup>13</sup> See especially Honey and Okafor (1998) and Pereira (2000).

'home', the greater communal instincts and abilities attributed to women are seen to derive from what are posited as their inherently superior capacities for 'care' and 'empathy' and their natural and interlinked roles as 'mothers' and 'home makers'. For example, in explaining why the UWA has done much more to contribute at 'home' than its co-ethnic and generally male-led Ukpenwa Development Union UK, a UWA executive argues:

I think the main reason is that we are women. Because women, back home in Nigeria, you find out that women are the ones who actually run the home, build a home. The men go out and bring the money but the women build a home, [...]. So we as a women's organisation brought this role upon us. We said, "We think about our people back home". Women are carers, they love caring for other people, they enjoy it [...]. (Interview, London, April 2006)

Similarly, another UWA member reflects:

Women are mothers, [...], we care, we think to care more for the people, to have that empathy. We cannot see somebody suffering, I mean some men, they will walk past; the women, they all have that sympathy and we have this caring attitude also. We are mothers so we have to care what is happening there [in Ukpenwa]". (Interview, London, April 2005)

With further explicit reference to established conceptions of gender difference derived from 'home', women are widely seen not only to have a particular concern for the ancestral community but also a greater ability to organise and intervene effectively for its benefit. For example, in accounting for why it was decided to form the UWA as a nominally separate entity from the Ukpenwa Development Union, an active UWA member contends:

Because women are powerful, they do things, they foresee things. If you leave it for the men alone they wouldn't achieve what we have achieved, [...]. I mean, we have Ukpenwa Union and we have men there as well but you notice in every way, [...], the women are more active to do things. So we just decided, 'Oh, the women group should be established and do things' because, how do you say, we are more intelligent, industrious and everything! [Laughs] Even back home, our mothers work more than the men. Our women are very industrious and they're more active, more dynamic than the men. (Interview, London, April 2005)

Significantly, however, the creation of diasporic geo-ethnic organisations by and for women does not generally constitute the wholesale withdrawal of women from what might be called ‘mainstream’ geo-ethnic associational life. Indeed, the members of diasporic geo-ethnic women’s organisations are very often also members of geo-ethnic diaspora organisations that are open to both men and women. Furthermore, the women’s groups generally work in close collaboration with their ‘mainstream’ counterparts, coordinating meetings so that they do not clash and often assisting each other with events and projects. Moreover, the women’s groups are often formally constituted, and/or operate in practice, as ‘wings’ or ‘branches’ of their ‘mainstream’ equivalents, thereby interacting with them in a way that appears to recreate rather than contest established gender roles and relations.

Illustrating the gendered nature of the relations that women’s groups tend to maintain with what might be seen as their generally male-dominated counterparts, most UWA members are members of the Ukpemwa Development Union (UDU) and undertake within it roles that are conventionally associated with women. For example, a UWA executive who is also a member of the UDU reports:

I have not taken any [leadership] position in Ukpemwa Union but I have worked really hard behind the scenes to support Ukpemwa Union, [...]. I’ve always been very supportive of them in one way or another, where they’re having their cultural dance, cooking for them, so I’ve kind of like supported them at the background [...]. (Interview, London, June 2006)

Furthermore, UWA stalwarts routinely see their organisation as a subordinate branch, rather than an equal partner, of the UDU. For example, an active member describes the UWA as “kind of like a subcommittee” of the UDU while others describe the UDU as the “mother” or “umbrella” union (Interviews, London, April and June 2006). Further replicating established, and what might be seen as patriarchal, gender relations at the organisational level, the UWA sometimes undertakes as a group to prepare the food for fundraising cultural events held by the UDU.

*From 'mothers' to 'home makers': collective transnational intervention and the 'empowerment' of women at 'home'*

The case of the UWA illustrates how the formation of diasporic geo-ethnic women's organisations is widely seen to reproduce, rather than contest and transform, the prevailing and arguably patriarchal gender roles and relations of 'home'. Furthermore, with ethnicised women's organisations like the UWA appearing not to have any kind of radical agenda to reformulate established gender conventions, it is little surprise that there is no evidence of these groups aspiring or attempting to 'empower' women at 'home' in the ways that globalising discourses of diaspora and development might hope and expect. For example, while the UWA supports the secondary education of a schoolgirl in Ukpenwa, members argue that this intervention has nothing to do with countering any perceived disadvantage that women might face in accessing education at 'home'. Indeed, UWA members and their co-ethnics at 'home' contend that if there is any gender discrimination in accessing education in Ukpenwa, it is poor boys who are the victims as they are more likely than poor girls to be encouraged to seek work instead of pursuing education. The value of educating girls has long been recognised in Ukpenwa, as in most of southern Nigeria, it is argued. Furthermore, it is asserted that the UWA's decision to support the girl simply reflects the fact that she is enrolled at a school that a number of UWA members attended and wanted to contribute to in some way.

Moreover, even the very few diaspora organisations that claim to pursue more radical agendas on behalf of women at 'home' could be seen to do little to contest and reshape established gender roles and relations in ways that globalising discourses of diaspora and development might hope and expect. This is illustrated by the case of the London-based NGO Nigerian Women for Development (NWD). Founded in 1995, NWD is the only UK-based Nigerian diaspora organisation identified that has an explicit focus on "empowering" women at 'home'. To this end, NWD's major transnational aspiration is to establish a "development centre" for the 'grassroots' women of the Niger Delta, at which beneficiaries would be given skills training in income-generating activities such as hairdressing, 'tie and dye', and *gari* (cassava flour) processing. However, it could be argued that while this planned intervention might improve the economic position of women, it would do little to "empower" them in the sense of challenging and transforming in their favour established gender roles and relations. After all, the areas in

which NWD proposes to provide skills training are widely seen as low-income activities that are very much the preserve of women. It is arguably unclear how training in these areas would contest prevailing gender conventions and “empower” women to enter and progress in areas of social, economic and political endeavour that might currently present significant barriers to women.

It is clear, then, that there is very little evidence of UK-based Nigerian diaspora organisations attempting or even aspiring to ‘empower’ women at ‘home’ to the extent and in the ways that globalising discourses of diaspora and development might imagine. Indeed, rather than working to contest and transform established gender roles and relations in favour of women, these groups appear to reproduce and reinforce prevailing gender conventions that could be seen as rather patriarchal. However, for many respondents in diaspora and at ‘home’, these prevailing conventions are entirely progressive, underpinning a gendered division of labour that has long served to further the development of women, their families and communities and the nation as a whole. As the director of a London-based pan-African women’s organisation contends, “traditional gender relations are complementary rather than exploitative” (Interview, London, October 2004).

Furthermore, women at ‘home’ and ‘abroad’ very much tend to argue that being recognised, respected and valued as ‘mothers’ and ‘home makers’ has long enabled them to accrue status and influence beyond the private sphere. Indeed, it is emphasised that by displaying supposedly inherent qualities of ‘care’ and ‘dynamism’, women in Nigeria have carved-out an important public presence as ‘mothers’ not only to their families but also to their communities and the wider nation. As such, it is argued, women have established a strong tradition of holding public position and power, heading local markets, being senior members of ‘traditional authorities’, playing key roles in ‘modern’ politics and government and leading anti-colonial, pro-democracy and Niger Delta protest movements<sup>14</sup>. Clearly, if globalising discourses of diaspora and development are ever to support the transnational ‘empowerment’ of women, it will be necessary for these discourses to take seriously the alternative understandings women at ‘home’ may have of what gender roles and relations can be regarded as ‘progressive’ and ‘empowering’.

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<sup>14</sup> See also Afigbo 1972; Okonjo 1976; Mba 1982; Amadiume 1987, 2000; Denzer 1994; Imam 1997; Olukoshi 1997; Enemuoh and Momoh 1999; Pereira 2000; Ibeanu 2001; Ukeje 2004; Chuku 2005, 2009; Ikelegbe 2005a; Nolte 2008; Johnson-Odim 2009.

## Conclusion

Contrary to the hopes and expectations of globalising discourses of diaspora and development, we have seen that London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations do not necessarily connect directly with and ‘empower’ women and ‘the poor’ at ‘home’. Indeed, although organised diasporans generally aspire to ‘help the poor’, we have seen that their collective transnational interventions are often channelled through local elite individuals and institutions, potentially limiting the benefits that might be felt at the ‘grass root level’ and possibly reinforcing rather than transforming established power hierarchies and entrenched socio-economic inequalities. Furthermore, we have also seen that London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations often reproduce established, and what might be considered rather patriarchal, gender roles and relations and rarely display any transnational desire to reconfigure these gender norms at ‘home’.

However, it has also been suggested that while collective diasporic interventions are generally channelled through, and can reinforce, local elites, these privileged intermediaries can operate in ways that enable transnational benevolence to reach and benefit ‘the poor’. And although diaspora groups might not seek to ‘empower’ women at ‘home’, it is clear that they can organise ‘abroad’ and intervene at ‘home’ in ways that maintain gender roles and relations widely considered in both contexts to afford women public recognition and power. From the perspective of globalising discourses of diaspora and development, the contribution of London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations to tackling gender and socio-economic inequality at ‘home’ is therefore rather more ambivalent than might be expected. Yet if national governments and international agencies are to engage and support the transnational contributions of these diaspora groups, it is necessary to acknowledge and respect the alternative and socially mediated ways in which ‘progress’ might be imagined and enacted both in diaspora and at ‘home’.

## **5. ‘Charity begins at home’: collective diasporic intervention and the transnational politics of belonging**

### **Introduction**

Globalising discourses of diaspora and development celebrate diaspora organisations as new development actors that not only ‘empower’ women and ‘the poor’ at ‘home’ but also promote liberal, democratic institutions and governance. Much has been made of this latter hope in Nigeria’s national discourses of diaspora and development. At the initiation of the Federal Government’s diaspora engagement initiatives in 2000, President Obasanjo emphasised his belief that overseas nationals could come together and contribute to “the political well-being, [...], and the sound governance” of Nigeria (Obasanjo 2000). However, as with tackling poverty and encouraging gender equality at ‘home’, London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations again appear to perform problematically the progressive role expected of them in globalising discourses of diaspora and development. Just as these groups can be seen to reinforce socio-economic and gender inequality at ‘home’, they can also be seen to reproduce the discourses and practices underpinning a pervasive and deeply divisive politics of belonging that incites sub-national, inter-ethnic competition for state power and resources and fundamentally undermines the entrenchment of liberal, democratic institutions and governance in the multi-ethnic state of Nigeria.

In this chapter, I trace how London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations can mobilise identities ‘abroad’ and make transnational interventions at ‘home’ in ways which implicate them in this debilitating politicisation of sub-national, geo-ethnic belonging that is so widely seen to threaten the very viability the Nigerian project. However, I go on to suggest that these groups and their border-spanning benevolence can not only reproduce and reinforce the ethnicised boundaries of belonging but can also soften and transcend them to articulate and pursue visions of Nigeria’s national development. If the hope that the organised diaspora will contribute to the building of a liberal, democratic nation is to be realised, national and globalising discourses of diaspora and development will have to take account of the deeply ambivalent transnational politics of belonging and devise ways in which its constructive potentials can be embraced.



## Endangering the 'nation': ethnic politics in Nigeria and the divisive potential of diaspora

A vast literature contends that, in the “immensely complex ethnic mosaic” that is Nigeria (Maier 2000: 76)<sup>1</sup>, the interplay between national and sub-national, geo-ethnic visions of belonging and development has produced an insidious and profoundly destabilising system of ethnicised competition for access to state power and resources (see for example, Nnoli 1978, 1995; Joseph 1987; Diamond 1988; Bach 1997; Osaghae 1998, 2003; Jega 2000; Vaughan 2000, 2001; Igwara 2001; Obi 2001; Suberu 2001; Ukiwo 2003, 2005; Adejumobi 2004, 2005; Isumonah 2004; Watts 2004a,b; Kraxberger 2004a,b, 2005; Obadare 2005; Ikelegbe 2005b; ICG 2006; Ukeje and Adebaniwi 2008). This politicisation of ethnicity tends to be traced to British colonial rule which, incrementally from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, not only imposed an artificial national boundary on hundreds of culturally, linguistically, and politically diverse peoples but also divided them into geo-ethnically defined administrative units, each governed indirectly through a ‘traditional authority’. Since independence in 1960, the politicisation of ethnicity is widely seen to have been perpetuated and deepened by the continuation of ethnicised strategies of divide and rule, a dependency on, and centralisation of, oil revenue, and the constitutional enshrinement of group belonging as a key basis for making and realising claims on the state. In these ways, geo-ethnic identity has become ripe for manipulation and mobilisation by ‘traditional’ and political elites in the contest to gain access to state power and resources. In turn, state largesse has come to be distributed more on the basis of geo-ethnic identity than on principles of need and economic efficiency, subverting the entrenchment of liberal, democratic institutions and governance.

Furthermore, in the wake of 16 years of divisive military rule and deepening economic crisis, the politics of belonging are widely seen to have become increasingly intense and more violent in recent years (Jega 2000; Ikelegbe 2001a,b; Ukeje 2001; Osaghae 2003; Ukiwo 2003; Nolte 2004; Adejumobi 2004, 2005; Ukeje and Adebaniwi 2008). Since

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<sup>1</sup> It is estimated that Nigeria has anywhere between 200 and 500 ‘tribes’ or ‘ethnic nationalities’, the largest of which are the three ‘majority’ groups: the Hausa-Fulani of the ‘North’, the Igbo of the ‘South-East’, and the Yoruba of the ‘South-West’ (Kraxberger 2005). The wider geo-ethnic formations of the ‘tribe’ or ‘ethnic nationality’ can generally be broken down into smaller geo-ethnic sub-groups, such as the ‘clan’ and ‘hometown’. For example, the Yoruba ‘ethnic nationality’ is constituted by several ‘branches’ or ‘sub-groups’ such as the Egba, Ekiti, Ijebu, and Ijesa, each of which encompasses many ancestral ‘hometowns’ or ‘kingdoms’ such as Ayege.

the return to democracy in 1999, ethnicised vigilante and militia groups have proliferated and 10 to 20 thousand people have reportedly been killed in communal bloodshed (Akinyele 2001; Ikelegbe 2001; Harnischfeger 2003; HRW 2003a; Nolte 2004; Adebani 2005; Adejumo 2005; NIC 2005; Reno 2005; ICG 2006; Pratten 2006, 2008). Consequently, many commentators have come to doubt the very survival of Nigeria as a unified entity, warning that the country is on the verge of becoming a 'failed state'. In one such case, a 2005 report by the United States's National Intelligence Council (NIC) predicted that the rise of 'identity politics' in Nigeria could well lead to its "outright collapse" by 2015 (NIC 2005: 16).

The NIC's specific fears for Nigeria followed its earlier warning that the growth and increasing transnational capabilities of diasporas was fuelling a global rise in 'identity politics', heightening internal ethnic and religious conflicts around the world (NIC 2004). This reflects arguments, often marginalized in globalising discourses of 'diaspora and development', contending that overseas nationals can produce divisive, even destructive effects at 'home' by directing transnational flows of money and materials to civil strife (Anderson 1998; Van Hear and Sørensen 2003; Adamson 2006). Indeed, one of the more influential examples of such arguments asserts that having a substantial diaspora makes countries in post-civil conflict situations up to six times more likely to witness a recurrence of hostilities (Collier 2000).

### **"Everybody is fighting for their own community"<sup>2</sup>: the transnational mobilisation of geo-ethnic identity**

Given warnings about both the divisive potential of diaspora and the fissiparous tensions in the Nigerian polity, it may not be surprising that many London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations can be implicated in a number of ways in the transnational reproduction and politicisation of the ethnicised boundaries of belonging. Grounded in sub-national, geo-ethnic identities ranging in scale from the likes of the 'village', 'hometown', 'kingdom', and 'clan' to wider formations such as the 'tribe' and 'ethnic nationality', the vast bulk of the examples identified in this study replicate the ethnicised modes of organisation that are widely seen to have been critical to the genesis and unfolding of ethnic politics in Nigeria (Coleman 1958, 1994; Sklar 1963; Aronson 1971; Melson and Wolpe 1971; Smock 1971; Ekeh 1975, 1992; Ahanotu 1982; Barkan

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<sup>2</sup> ANPU London member, interview, London, April 2006.

et al 1991; Osaghae 1994, 1995; Vaughan 1995; Honey and Okafor 1998; Ikelegbe 2001a,b; Smith 2001; Trager 2001; Abbott 2002; Adejumobi 2004; Ukiwo 2005). Indeed, ever since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when rural migrants to Nigeria's urban centres of colonial opportunity first came together on the basis of geo-ethnic identity to provide mutual support and lobby the government to attend to the development of their communities of origin, 'hometown associations' and 'ethnic unions' have been, and remain, key players in the struggles to access power and resources in a political system that continues to privilege geo-ethnic group belonging as a basis for making claims on the state (ibid.). Like these ethnicised organisations at 'home', geo-ethnic diaspora organisations also define membership principally on the basis of 'indigeneity'<sup>3</sup> and frame their objectives primarily in relation to the interests of a shared, sub-national ancestral 'homeland' and its descendents at 'home' and 'abroad'.

The boundaries of indigeneity are reproduced transnationally not only through the constitutional basis of these ethnicised diaspora organisations such as ANPU London, but also in the ways that their members tend to rehearse well-worn narratives about the politics of 'home'. These accounts often politicise ethnicity through the deployment of familiar tropes of minority status and economic and political marginalisation in what is constructed as an inter-group competition for fair access to the 'national cake'. The overriding concern is that co-ethnics at 'home' are dominated by other geo-ethnic groups. Members of ANPU London bemoan that the marginalisation of their ancestral kingdom of Ayege is such that it struggles to win fair recognition and reward even at level of government supposedly closest to the people. It is decried that after more than a century of agitation against administrative subordination to neighbouring kingdoms, Ayege has still not been given a local government area of its own. Members bitterly lament that the arrangement of 'sharing' a local government with other kingdoms means that Ayege has had to fight to access even the crumbs of the 'national cake' available at the lowest tier of the Nigerian state, afflicting their ancestral kingdom with a particularly woeful level of social, economic, and infrastructural development.

It is through such narratives that the dynamics of geo-ethnic contestations of power come to inform both the creation of ethnicised diaspora organisations and the nature of

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<sup>3</sup> The concept of 'indigeneity' is constitutionally enshrined and popularly employed in Nigeria as a means of ascertaining geo-ethnic belonging. A person is regarded as an 'indigene' of, and therefore as belonging to, a particular geo-ethnic community if the origin of their ancestral lineage can be traced to that community (Bach 1997; Kraxberger 2005; HRW 2006).

the transnational interventions they seek to make. An argument that the ancestral community is politically marginalised by other geo-ethnic groups and is, as a consequence, inadequately provided for by the state is employed to assert a responsibility to organise and intervene transnationally on the basis of indigeneity. As a member of ANPU London contends:

[T]he Local Government has been very unhelpful to Ayege's cause for years. They've starved the town of funds and they've diverted most of it to its neighbouring town, which tends to suck all its power. So as concerned sons and daughters, members have taken upon themselves to come together and more than often to contribute from their own pocket to achieve things for the benefit of Ayege. (Interview, London, June 2005)

Indeed, members of ethnicised diaspora organisations often opine that the geo-ethnic marginalisation of their ancestral communities makes it necessary to pursue an indigenised understanding of an adage they often deploy; 'charity begins at home'.

In addition to dispensing transnational benevolence within the boundaries of indigeneity, geo-ethnic diaspora organisations also seek to intervene more directly in the politics of belonging at 'home' by lobbying the state to recognise and reward their communities of ancestral origin. Aside from having collectively written on occasion to the Governor of Iroko State about issues of especially pressing concern to Ayege, members of ANPU London implore friends and acquaintances who occupy strategic positions in the local, state, and federal governments to use their influence to see that the particular needs and aspirations of the kingdom are attended to. Some ethnicised diaspora organisations, especially those bemoaning the political and economic marginalisation, militarisation, and environmental degradation of their ancestral homelands in the oil-producing Niger Delta, have even attempted to assert indigenised interests by writing directly to the President of Nigeria. Furthermore, geo-ethnic diaspora organisations also seek to advance the sectional agendas of their ancestral homelands by meeting with government officials and aspiring politicians when they make visits to the UK.

*“A negotiating committee for the town”<sup>4</sup>: ethnicised intermediaries and the perpetuation of geo-ethnic rivalry at ‘home’*

Many London-based geo-ethnic diaspora organisations can be indirectly, and yet often more deeply, implicated in the reproduction of a divisive politics of belonging through the discourses and practices of the local indigenised institutions they engage with when seeking to make transnational interventions at ‘home’. As we saw earlier, ANPU London, like many ‘hometown associations’ and ‘ethnic unions’, collaborates with, and provides funds to, a ‘home’-based ‘apex’ or ‘parent’ organisation, in this case the Ayege Progress Committee (APC). For Omoyeges at ‘home’ and ‘abroad’, a central role of the APC is to lead the communal lobbying efforts aimed at winning Ayege a fair slice of the ‘national cake’. As the executive arm of the kingdom’s ‘traditional authorities’, the APC maintains Omoyege pressure on the local, state, and federal governments with petitions and the sending and receiving of delegations. Prominent requests made by the APC on behalf of Ayege include those for the restoration of pipe-borne water and regular electricity supply, a connection to a telephone network, the establishment of a tertiary educational institution, and the creation of a separate local government for the kingdom.

To augment their direct lobbying for such favours, the Oba, his council of chiefs, and the APC monitor and seek to activate ethnicised connections to the three tiers of the Nigerian state. The ‘traditional authorities’ identify Omoyeges advantageously located within the state apparatus and encourage them to remember the needs and aspirations of their kingdom in the discharge of their official duties. Not only are such well-placed ‘sons and daughters’ publicly named and celebrated upon appointment or promotion, they are also promised further disbursements of recognition, honour, and favour should they utilise their strategic positions to direct the gaze and munificence of the state towards the ancestral homeland.

When ethnicised lobbying and connections fail, the APC turns to Ayege’s tradition of ‘self-help’ in its quest to ‘bring development’ to the kingdom. Most of Ayege’s social and economic infrastructure, including its first secondary school and first two hospitals, has been provided not by the state but by the ‘communal effort’ coordinated by the kingdom’s ‘traditional authorities’ and funded by the extended Omoyege community of which ANPU London has intermittently formed a part since the 1960s. Given this proud

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<sup>4</sup> ANPU London member, interview, London, June 2005.

tradition of 'self-help', the APC and 'patriotic' Omoyeges at 'home' and 'abroad' explicitly present Ayege as having forged a considerable degree of autonomy from the Nigerian state. As one APC official contends, "[W]e help ourselves, we don't wait for the government to do anything for us" (Interview, Ayege, November 2005).

Moreover, through its efforts to drive and coordinate 'communal effort', the APC is widely seen among Omoyeges within and beyond the kingdom to be more responsible and benevolent than 'government'. The APC thereby challenges the Nigerian state in terms of the degree of legitimacy and loyalty it enjoys among its 'citizens' at 'home' and 'abroad'. As Ayege's Catholic priest asserts of the APC, "[W]e feel more at home with them than government, because if we have problems we run to them right before government" (Interview, Ayege, December 2005). Furthermore, in attempting to sustain the practice of 'self-help', we have seen above how the APC seeks to augment the level of 'primary patriotism' (Geschiere and Gugler 1998) it attracts from its extended 'citizenry' by asserting through events such as the annual Ayege Day festival the importance and potential rewards of loyalty to an Omoyege cultural identity and 'homeland' over all others.

The APC's pursuit of 'self-help' not only encourages Omoyege 'citizens' at 'home' and 'abroad' to direct their primary loyalty away from the Nigerian state towards the sub-national, geo-ethnic formation of Ayege but also represents a further attempt to make an ethnicised claim on the state. Indeed, the practice of 'self-help' is often seen to have political capital in the inter-communal struggle to be considered deserving of the attention and munificence of the state. As an Omoyege youth leader asserts, "We want to believe that the government will want to assist those communities that are actually helping themselves" (Interview, Ayege, December 2005). Furthermore, the APC's 'self-help' projects, especially the imposing town hall and the Oba's 'ultra-modern' palace, are seen as attempts to raise the profile and status of Ayege above those of other communities, marking it out as a 'modern' and 'progressive' realm worthy of the attention and benevolence of the state.

The APC also deploys the resources accruing to it from the extended Omoyege community in more direct efforts to win favour for Ayege in the inter-communal contest for state largesse. Given the importance of population size in making communal claims on the state, census exercises have always been highly politicised in Nigeria (see for

example Diamond 1988 and Suberu 2001). Indeed, accusations of manipulation abound as competing geo-ethnic formations apparently seek to inflate their size. In Ayege, the national census is certainly seen to be of great importance in justifying the kingdom's quest to win its own local government and an attendant slice of the 'national cake'. Consequently, as the Oba reported to ANPU London when he visited the organisation during his annual holiday to the UK in late 2005, the APC was making plans to 'supervise' the upcoming 2006 national census exercise to ensure a 'full and fair' count of Ayege's demographic strength. Just as it had done during the 1991 exercise, the APC was to provide 'guides' and 'subsidise transport costs' so as to encourage poorly-paid enumerators to venture out to the relatively remote and inaccessible corners of the kingdom they might otherwise have been unwilling to visit. While members of the 'traditional authorities' were keen to emphasise their 'supervision' would not extend to paying enumerators to count phantom citizens, there were accusations in the national press that at least some communities in southwest Nigeria were planning to "buy the enumerators to inflate figures" (Oladoyinbo 2005).

The APC takes further opportunities to 'supervise' and incentivise the state during government boundary commissions. Again reflecting ways in which the politics of belonging have unfolded nationally, the APC has attempted to assert the demographic and territorial strength of Ayege by becoming increasingly embroiled since the late 1970s in land disputes with neighbouring kingdoms. When the state is brought in to adjudicate in these disputes, the APC stands ready to 'assist' the government boundary commissioners with the costs of "logistics and mobility" and by providing a team of 'guides' who are "able to show them the boundaries" (Interview, APC official, Ayege, November 2005). Furthermore, it was suggested that for such 'supervision' to win a favourable decision for Ayege, it might also have to involve the APC 'thanking' the commissioners for their work.

The issue of disputed land not only highlights further how the APC might deploy the financial resources entrusted to it by the extended Omoyege community to incentivise the state to favour the particular geo-ethnic interests of Ayege. Land disputes also represent the most apparent manifestation of the way in which the APC reproduces what is widely seen to have become such a divisive notion in the politics of belonging in Nigeria: indigeneity (Bach 1997; Nolte 2004; Watts 2004a,b; Kraxberger 2005; HRW 2006; ICG 2006). Members of the 'traditional authorities' routinely trace the genesis of

land disputes to the actions of people who trace their ancestry to geo-ethnic homelands other than Ayege. Labelled ‘non-indigenes’ and also commonly referred to as ‘aliens’, ‘strangers’, and ‘settlers’, these people are seen to have migrated from surrounding kingdoms to rent and farm ancestral Ayege land. Apparently emboldened by their demographic dominance in many Omoyege villages and supposedly supported by the local governments and ‘traditional authorities’ of their own ancestral homelands, it is argued that these ‘non-indigenes’ have not only increasingly refused to pay ‘royalties’ to their Omoyege landlords but have also, and even more provocatively, claimed for their communities of origin the Ayege land they ‘occupy’.

The loss of ancestral land to ‘aliens’ is at the heart of what members of the APC and the Oba’s council of chiefs sometimes represent as a wider contest between ‘indigenes’ and ‘non-indigenes’ for access to livelihood opportunities. Indeed, some members of the ‘traditional authorities’ are concerned about, and have publicly bemoaned, not only how ‘non-indigenes’ are claiming control of Ayege land and agricultural production but also how they have become a powerful force in the manual, artisan, service, and trading sectors of the kingdom’s economy. Tensions have developed along an ‘indigene’/‘non-indigene’ fault line with a number of the many Omoyege occupational associations under the APC’s umbrella taking on the character of ethnicised ‘cartels’ by attempting to bar ‘non-indigenes’ from entry into their respective trades. Furthermore, the APC has taken direct action to explicitly support ‘indigenes’ in their apparent struggle with ‘non-indigenes’. For example, the APC has utilised the financial resources it has attracted from the extended Omoyege community to buy land from the state to distribute exclusively to ‘sons and daughters of the soil’.

There is some concern in Ayege that the politics of indigeneity, which the APC clearly narrates and makes material interventions in, has the potential to incite violence just as it has in many other parts of Nigeria. Significantly, the APC has the ability to organise physical force to defend what it perceives to be Ayege’s interests. Mirroring what has been a growing trend across Nigeria’s communities and wider geo-ethnic formations, the APC, with specific funding from Omoyege individuals and organisations at ‘home’ and ‘abroad’ including ANPU London, established in 1996 the Ayege Vanguard (AV), an Omoyege vigilante group. While the AV’s founding rationale and operational focus are not explicitly framed in terms of intervening in disputes between ‘indigenes’ and ‘non-indigenes’, they are aimed at countering “external aggression” (AV participant,



interview, Ayege, December 2005). Although the particular outside threat targeted is armed robbery, it could be argued that the AV has the potential to make the transition from vigilante group to ethnic militia seen elsewhere in Nigeria, thereby heralding the possibility of the APC escalating its interventions in the politics of indigeneity to include violence.

While the APC, the ‘parent’ body of ANPU London, has not mobilised force to incite violent communal conflict, the same cannot be stated categorically of the ‘home’ branches of other London-based geo-ethnic diaspora organisations. For example, the Urhobo Progress Union, which has an affiliate organisation in the UK, and its leader, Chief Okumagba, are often seen as key protagonists, even instigators, in the bloody conflagration between the Itsekiri, Ijaw, and Urhobo over the ancestral and political ‘ownership’ of Warri (Ibharuneafe 2001; Ikime 2001; Imobighe et al 2002; HRW 2003b, 2006; WNC/ILF 2003; Ireyleneju 2004; Uzum 2005). Still smouldering, the ‘Warri Crisis’ claimed hundreds if not thousands of lives between 1997 and 2003 (Imobighe et al 2002; HRW 2003b, 2006). Some members of the UK affiliate of the UPU are critical of what they see as the inflammatory role of Chief Okumagba and the UPU ‘headquarters’ in the crisis. Nonetheless, the UK affiliate has remained constitutionally and financially linked to the UPU in Warri.

#### **“We are all Nigerians”<sup>5</sup>: from geo-ethnic loyalties to pan-Nigerian desires**

While they can be seen to reproduce and reinforce the indigenised identities and practices that underpin some of the most divisive forms of ethnic politics in Nigeria, diaspora organisations grounded in apparently exclusive geo-ethnic identities can also soften, negotiate, and even transcend the ethnicised boundaries of belonging in ways that foster cordial relations of inter-ethnic affinity. Although membership of such organisations is defined principally in terms of indigeneity, it also tends to be open to ‘non-indigene’ spouses. Furthermore, provision is sometimes made for associate, affiliate, or honorary membership to be awarded to ‘non-indigene’ ‘friends’, especially those who have contributed in some way to the organisation and/or its community of origin. ‘Non-indigene’ ‘guests’ are often also welcome to attend organisation meetings and can even become regular participants.

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<sup>5</sup> Hometown association member, interview, April 2006.

The indigenised boundaries of belonging become particularly fluid and open to the development of convivial inter-ethnic interaction and affinity during the fundraising celebrations that London-based geo-ethnic diaspora organisations generally aspire to hold annually. The established custom is for the hosting organisation to invite individuals and organisations identifying with different ancestral heritages so as to establish reciprocal inter-ethnic relations of hospitality and mutual benevolence. The reciprocal hosting and making of donations between ANPU London and unions representing Ayege's neighbouring kingdoms and between the respective associations of the three 'ethnic-nationalities' tracing their ancestry to Warri suggests that annual fundraising events can constitute a space in which even the most entrenched boundaries of supposedly intense geo-ethnic rivalry at 'home' can be softened and negotiated in diaspora.

Geo-ethnic diaspora organisations can also transcend the indigenised boundaries of belonging through some of the interventions they make in Nigeria. This reflects a desire expressed by members of a number of such organisations for their collective benevolence to extend to Nigeria as whole and even to other African countries once it had met its primary obligation to the ancestral community. After all, the common refrain among members of geo-ethnic diaspora organisations that 'charity begins at home' implies that while the dispensing of transnational munificence starts with the community of ancestral descent, it might not end there. Hence ANPU London recently donated to an appeal on a UK-based Nigerian diaspora radio station to help cover the medical costs of a non-Omoyege girl in Nigeria who had been badly burnt in an accident. The Calabar Union is very active in the multi-ethnic Cross River State Union, through which it has donated to a school for the blind in Obudu. The Ozubulu Women Association (OWA) supports 'a home for disabled children' which, while located in their hometown, has a regional catchment area. The OWA has also sent books and medical equipment to a teaching hospital in neighbouring Enugu State.

The undertaking by the Itsekiri Women's Association (IWA) to construct a 'cottage hospital' at 'home' is framed as an explicit attempt to make a conciliatory gesture towards healing some of the geo-ethnic antagonisms underpinning the 'Warri Crisis'. Mrs Eyimofi, an IWA member, insists that the proposed hospital is to be located on a disputed boundary between the association's co-ethnic Itsekiri and one of their adversaries in the crisis, the Urhobo, so as to be readily accessible to both groups. While

this could be interpreted as a transnational attempt to assert Itsekiri claims to the land, the fundraising launch event for the project saw a prominent member of the London-based Urhobo community publicly endorse this Itsekiri initiative as a genuine effort to foster more amicable relations between the two groups. Indeed, Mrs Eyimofi argues that the project reflects a wider desire to see “a prosperous Nigeria where all tribes come together” (Interview, London, August 2004).

Just as geo-ethnic diaspora organisations can work to soften and negotiate indigenised boundaries of belonging, so too can their ‘home’-based ‘parent’ bodies. The Ayege Progress Committee (APU), the ‘apex’ organisation for the Ayege National Progress Union (ANPU) London, is seen to foster ‘inter-community relations’ through its annual Ayege Day festival. Despite the event being a celebration of Omoyege patriotism, the playing of the Nigerian national anthem precedes that of its Ayege counterpart in the opening formalities. Furthermore, ‘non-indigenes’ are invited to participate, especially those whose wealth and/or influence have been or may be of benefit to the kingdom. Framed as ‘friends’ rather than ‘strangers’, such ‘non-indigenes’ often join in the revelry as ‘guests of honour’ and some are even bestowed with honorary Omoyege chieftaincy titles.

Bolstering still further the formation of such cordial inter-ethnic relations, the ‘traditional authorities’ recognise and reward Omoyeges at the festival not only for remembering and acting on their primary loyalty to their ancestral homeland of Ayege but also for extending some of their munificence and service beyond its boundaries to other communities and, indeed, the wider Nigerian nation. It is made clear that a ‘patriotic’ Omoyege can also be a ‘detribalised’ Nigerian. After all, loyal ‘sons and daughters of the soil’ are more ‘useful’ to Ayege if they can foster convivial relationships with ‘non-indigenes’ who are able to assist in the channelling of financial and political capital to the kingdom.

The ‘traditional authorities’ themselves also seek to nurture cordial relations with other communities, including even Ayege’s closest neighbour and traditional adversary, the kingdom of Asiki. Unlike their immediate predecessors, the incumbent obas of the two kingdoms interact with each other, exchanging letters and meeting regularly. Under these obas, the APC and its counterpart, the Asiki Development Council, meet every three months in order to discuss mutually beneficial political and developmental

initiatives and to resolve any inter-communal disputes peacefully and without expensive recourse to lawyers or the state. Furthermore, the two obas, their chiefs, and their respective development committees attend, and make substantial contributions to, each other's annual community fundraising events.

The Oba, his council of chiefs, and the APC also make efforts to cultivate convivial and mutually supportive relations with 'non-indigenes' residing within Ayege. The 'traditional authorities' meet with 'hometown associations' and 'ethnic unions' formed by migrants to the kingdom and their descendents and are responsive to their opinions and concerns. For example, the Oba and the APC have instructed Omoyege occupational associations to desist from blocking the entry of 'non-indigenes' to their respective trades, declaring the kingdom a 'free market zone'. In turn, 'non-indigene' organisations are encouraged to participate in the development of Ayege and duly respond, most notably through their active support of Ayege Day at which they regularly make substantial donations. 'Non-indigene' residents who have proven themselves to be particularly engaged in the progress of the kingdom have even been appointed to positions in the 'traditional authorities'.

***'Irrespective of tribe': organising and intervening beyond the ethnicised boundaries of belonging***

Beyond those grounded in, and operating through, specific geo-ethnic identities, there are also many London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations that do not define membership or make transnational interventions on the basis of ethnicity. Established in 1999, Development Impact for Nigeria (DIFN) exemplifies diaspora NGOs that explicitly seek to operate in transcendence of the ethnicised boundaries of belonging, stating in its objectives that it is "for all Nigerians irrespective of faith, tribe, age or gender" ([www.difn.org.uk](http://www.difn.org.uk)). Indeed, in its attempts to win support for its health and community development-oriented transnational interventions, the organisation actively targets the UK-based Nigerian diaspora as a whole. While the ancestral origins of the six UK-based trustees are all within the Yoruba geo-ethnic formation, they are nonetheless diverse and include Abeokuta in Ogun State, Igbajo in Osun State, and Ikorodu in Lagos State. The trustees came together in the UK through local church and neighbourhood connections rather than any ethnicised network. Furthermore, they are

anxious to attract new trustees and supporters who will enable the organisation to reflect more of Nigeria's geo-ethnic diversity.

DIFN commenced its programmes and established its Nigeria office in Ipaja, Lagos State, a community with which none of the UK-based trustees had any prior links. The choice of Ipaja as the initial focus and main base of transnational intervention was due entirely to Pastor Bode Omokaro, who was appointed DIFN's Nigeria co-ordinator after meeting and impressing the organisation's diasporic founder at a conference in Lagos in 1999. Bode is not an 'indigene' of Ipaja but has been very actively involved in local health and development initiatives during the 15 years he has lived there and this was something that DIFN wanted to support and build on. Bode was also engaged because he has a master's degree in community development and many years community health experience as a senior Red Cross volunteer. Furthermore, he was also found to share DIFN's inclusive notion of belonging and progress. Indeed, Bode makes a point of identifying himself first and foremost as a Nigerian and believes that ethnic patriotism has often been a detrimental force in Nigeria. This is one reason why he chooses not to maintain links with his ancestral Yoruba community in Ibadan, Oyo State, and prefers instead to devote his energy, skills, and limited financial resources to Ipaja, his community of residence.

In assembling DIFN's team in Ipaja, Bode has employed two staff on the basis of their experience in community health work, both of whom identify with Ijaw rather than Yoruba heritages, one tracing ancestry to Rivers State, the other to Bayelsa State. Moreover, working through local schools, clinics, churches, and a variety of youth and community organisations, DIFN is widely seen to engage much of Ipaja's high level of ethnic diversity. Indeed, local teachers, health practitioners, church workers, government officials, national journalists, and programme participants make a point of noting and praising DIFN's ethnically inclusive approach to community and development. Just as its diasporic founders intended, DIFN explicitly operates with a pan-Nigerian vision of progress, not only embracing ethnic diversity within Ipaja but also actively extending its work across Nigeria by advertising its major training workshops nationally and by forging links with organisations in different geo-ethnic regions.

Diaspora organisations grounded in professional identities also have much potential for articulating and pursuing national visions of belonging and development. This contention lay at the heart of Dr Kunle Onabolu's founding vision for the Engineering Forum of Nigerians (EFN), of which he became the inaugural president in 2002. He reasoned that in the absence of a common ethnic or religious identity, professional identity could constitute the "rallying point needed for [diasporic Nigerians] to come together for the good of Nigeria" (Interview, London, May 2005). Consequently, EFN is explicitly constituted as "an inclusive body [that] welcomes all peoples of Nigerian descent or affiliation who are engaged in [...] the practice of any of the various engineering disciplines" ([www.efn.org.uk/Membership.htm](http://www.efn.org.uk/Membership.htm)).

For Dr Onabolu, any form of discrimination on the basis of ethnicity is utterly incompatible not only with the values of the organisation but also with the 'code of practice' to which professionals in general should adhere. The application of such thinking in the operation of EFN is suggested not only by the ethnic diversity of its membership and event participants but also by the way in which its transnational interventions are targeted at Nigeria as a whole. For example, the Higher Education Engineering Challenge it launched at the National Engineering Centre in Lagos in 2006 is an annual competition to devise an innovative solution to a set engineering problem "considered of vital importance to national development" and is open to all engineering and technology undergraduates in higher education institutions in Nigeria ([www.efn.org.uk/heec.htm](http://www.efn.org.uk/heec.htm)).

Indeed, in line with Dr Onabolu's founding vision, EFN's central objective to contribute to the engineering sector in Nigeria is explicitly framed within national discourses of development. For example, after participants had been invited to stand for the Nigerian national anthem at EFN's 2006 London event "Opportunities in the transportation sector in Nigeria", Dr Onabolu asserted in his welcome address that EFN was constituted by "engineers of Nigerian descent interested in putting something back into the development of their nation". By "committing time and resources" in a collective attempt to do so, Dr Onabolu suggested that members of the organisation were honouring the sentiment of President Kennedy's patriotic call, "Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country".

In pursuing this desire to contribute to the progress of Nigeria as a whole, a key strategy EFN has adopted is to directly engage and actively support the nation-building efforts of the Nigerian state. Among the audience listening to Dr Onabolu's speech at the 2006 event were the Nigerian Deputy High Commissioner to the UK, the Nigerian Minister of State for Transport, and senior civil servants from Nigerian transport 'parastatals'. Having endorsed the latest plans these officials were to present for developing Nigeria's transport system, Dr Onabolu advised the assembled diasporic Nigerians and their British colleagues, "The time is right for the UK business community and investors to take a closer look and get involved".

In response, the Nigerian Deputy High Commissioner commended EFN and asserted that its objectives were in line with the aspirations of the Federal Government. Indeed, such was the apparent concordance between the visions of EFN and those of the Nigerian state that when President Obasanjo received a report on the event, he decided to invite an EFN delegation to meet him in Abuja, some members of which were subsequently offered senior positions in Federal Government transport agencies. As one who could not resist the opportunity to deploy his knowledge and skills in the service of his 'home' nation, the EFN Secretary became the Project Director of the Nigerian Railway Modernisation Project, assuming oversight responsibility for the US\$8.3 billion dollar construction of Nigeria's new national rail network.

### **Between geo-ethnic loyalties and pan-Nigerian desires: diaspora organisations and the articulation of multiple attachments**

In imagining and pursuing national visions of belonging and development, EFN reflects what is a trend among London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations grounded in professional identities. Associations of UK-based Nigerian accountants, lawyers, medics, and nurses also open their memberships beyond the ethnicised boundaries of belonging and explicitly aim their transnational interventions at the benefit of Nigeria as a whole. Furthermore, such organisations have also joined EFN in beginning to engage directly with the nation-building efforts of the Nigerian state.

However, no matter how committed diasporic professional associations are to the 'national development' of Nigeria, there can be limits to how far their memberships and transnational interventions extend beyond the ethnicised boundaries of belonging in

practice. As Mr Samuels, a senior official in the Federal Government's diaspora engagement programme, recognises, the geo-ethnic composition of these organisations generally reflects the fact that the Nigerian diaspora in the UK, like that in the US, is dominated by people tracing their ancestry to southern Nigeria. Consequently, he argues, the direct transnational interventions made by these organisations sometimes tend to be concentrated in that half of the country. For example, he contends that associations of Nigerian medics in the UK and US have sent the "bulk" of their medical missions to the 'South-East', 'South-West', and 'South-South' 'geo-political zones', i.e. the respective ancestral homelands of the Igbo, Yoruba, and the numerous 'ethnic nationalities' of the Niger Delta (Interview, Abuja, October 2005). Indeed, one such association based in the UK has stated an explicit desire to deliver 'medical missions' across Nigeria and yet all but one of the five completed missions for which it has reported a location have been to one of these three southern geo-ethnic regions.

Mr Samuels argues that this ethno-regional imbalance betrays how diasporic professional associations can distribute at least some of their border-spanning benevolence in ways that respond to sub-national, ancestral loyalties among their members. Furthermore, he contends that even though such organisations harbour genuine desires to intervene in geo-ethnic regions that are not well represented within their memberships, they tend to lack the local connections necessary to do so. Indeed, this illustrates how ethnicised interests and ties can manifest even through diaspora organisations that explicitly claim to imagine and pursue national visions of belonging and development. This can be seen most blatantly in some diaspora NGOs that profess pan-Nigerian and even pan-African visions of progress and yet appear to extend their transnational interventions little beyond the ancestral homelands of their founders.

However, for many respondents, acting on affective ties to an ancestral community does not necessarily preclude or contradict desires and efforts to contribute to other communities and the development of Nigeria as a whole. Indeed, we have already seen how geo-ethnic diaspora organisations such as ANPU London can extend their transnational benevolence beyond the bounds of indigeneity and express aspirations for pan-Nigerian progress. Furthermore, diasporans can articulate loyalties to both an ancestral community and Nigeria by participating in multiple organisations. A member of an explicitly ethnicised organisation that directs transnational interventions primarily to the particular benefit of an ancestral homeland can also be a member of an



organisation that explicitly seeks to extend its membership and border-spanning benevolence beyond the ethnicised boundaries of belonging. For example, Mr Okafor is both a member of the 'town union' representing and supporting his ancestral community and an active participant in the Engineering Forum of Nigerians which, as we saw earlier, employs an inclusive notion of belonging, is deeply committed to Nigeria's 'national development', and engages directly with the policies and programmes of the Federal Government. It would seem that one can be a patriotic citizen of both a geo-ethnic nation and the Nigerian nation.

## **Conclusion**

In contrast to Mr Okafor, Dr Onabolu, the President of EFN, is not involved in any explicitly ethnicised diaspora organisation, believing firmly that any form of intervention aimed at development should respond to need and not ethnicity. He argues that while such organisations often make seemingly beneficial contributions at 'home' such as supporting local schools and hospitals, they can be seen to do so in ways that are detrimental to coordinated and cohesive 'national development'. Indeed, we have seen how geo-ethnic diaspora organisations can reproduce a pervasive and insidiously divisive politics of belonging that, for many commentators, fundamentally undermines the entrenchment of liberal, democratic governance and renders the Nigerian state incapable of fulfilling its obligations to its citizens.

However, we have seen how these explicitly ethnicised diaspora organisations and their transnational interventions can also transcend the ethnicised boundaries of belonging in ways that foster convivial inter-ethnic relations and signal desires to see Nigeria fulfil its promise as a nation. Furthermore, we have seen that there are also many London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations that do not define membership or make transnational interventions on the basis of ethnicity but instead pursue pan-Nigerian visions of belonging and development. Indeed, in the case of professional associations, such organisations are even being engaged with some enthusiasm by the Nigerian state in its nation-building efforts.

Clearly, by both reproducing and transcending a divisive politics of belonging, London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations are involved in the progress of 'home' in ways that are much more ambivalent than celebratory national and globalising discourses of

'diaspora and development' might hope. Yet it is only by recognising and engaging constructively with this ambivalence that the Nigerian state and international development agencies can have any hope of realising the full potential of the organised diaspora in advancing the Nigerian project. While London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations can be seen to have a problematic relationship with the progress of the Nigerian nation, it is important to note that even those explicitly grounded in sub-national, geo-ethnic identities overwhelmingly aspire to a united and prosperous Nigeria and have contributions to make to the realisation of this dream. However, if the transnational desires and capabilities of all diaspora organisations are to be harnessed in Nigerian nation-building, it will be necessary for the Nigerian state and international agencies to articulate and pursue more cosmopolitan visions of diaspora, belonging, and development. Only then will it be possible for the Nigerian project to embrace the geo-ethnic diversity, multiple attachments, and full progressive promise of the organised diaspora as a whole.

## **Part 3: collective transnational power and its limits**

## **6. Transforming ‘home’ from ‘abroad’? Collective remittances, political influence and the limits of collective transnational power**

### **Introduction**

As we saw in Chapter 2, globalising discourses of diaspora and development are increasingly celebrating diaspora organisations as powerful drivers of development at ‘home’, investing these groups with the capacity to make decisive contributions to, and produce major transformative effects in, communities and countries of origin. Within these discourses, very often the most significant way in which diaspora organisations are seen to make vital contributions to ‘home’ from afar is by remitting substantial volumes of money and materials. By virtue of these ‘collective remittances’, diaspora organisations are posited as a prime, and often the primary, source of tangible, material progress at ‘home’, building and maintaining schools and hospitals, providing and transforming public infrastructure and establishing and financing local cooperative enterprise. Furthermore, diaspora organisations are seen to buttress their ‘collective remittances’ through acts of ‘political transnationalism’, exploiting the strategic space of diaspora to lobby ‘host’ and ‘home’ states to attend to issues of potential benefit to communities and countries of origin. In this way, diaspora organisations are imbued with the power to exert important influence in support of the progress of ‘home’.

Through their collective remittances and political transnationalism, diaspora organisations are seen, then, to make profound contributions to ‘homeland’ development. As we saw earlier, Portes et al (2007: 256) give the example of a Dominican ‘hometown association’ (HTA) that has “literally transformed” its hometown. The hometown has, they claim, “grown increasingly reliant on the loyalty and generosity of [its] migrants for a number of needs unattended by the national government” (ibid.). Indeed, in summing-up the contribution of HTAs, Portes and Landolt (2000: 543) argue:

Life conditions in municipalities that receive ‘grassroots transnational aid’ confirm the economic relevance of this collective remittance strategy. Towns with a home town association [abroad] have paved roads, electricity, and freshly painted public buildings. ...[T]he quality of life in transnational towns is quite simply better.

However, it would seem that the collective remittances and political transnationalism of London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations produce nothing like these sorts of profoundly transformative effects at ‘home’. Indeed, there tends to be very little knowledge at ‘home’ of these groups and their contributions and even those who are aware overwhelmingly see collective transnational interventions as rather limited and of marginal importance to local and/or national development. Significantly, respondents at ‘home’ consistently stress that the material benevolence and political influence of diaspora organisations pales into relative insignificance compared to that of individuals and organisations based in Nigeria. At the community level, for example, it is ‘indigenes’ and their associations based in the community itself or its diaspora within Nigeria that are identified and celebrated as by far and away the most important drivers of local development. Clearly, if the danger of overplaying the monetary, material and political contributions of overseas diaspora organisations is to be avoided, it will be necessary for globalising discourses of diaspora and development to afford far greater recognition to the benevolence and influence of more local individual and collective actors based within the ‘home’ state itself.

#### **“Our little impact”: transnational collective remittances and transformation at ‘home’**

Rather than seeing diaspora organisations as major drivers of change that can transform entire communities and even the nation as a whole, ‘home’-based respondents overwhelmingly consider such groups to have a very limited impact on processes of development in Nigeria. Indeed, many ‘home’-based respondents are completely unaware of any diaspora organisations based overseas, arguing that if these groups do exist, they have done nothing to contribute to ‘home’ and have no impact on local or national progress. Even the relatively few ‘home’-based respondents who are aware of diaspora organisations generally assert that such groups tend to make a rather modest, often marginal, contribution from afar. For example, the director of a leading umbrella organisation for NGOs in Nigeria expresses an awareness of the state-initiated Nigerians in Diaspora Organisation but contends:

[...T]he connection between [NIDO] and what’s happening in Nigeria, I haven’t seen it personally. Whether they are doing things that are useful, I don’t know, but I haven’t seen the direct connection and their

ability to harness resources from Britain for instance and actively deliver them to communities here. (Interview, Lagos, October 2005)

Similarly, a senior official of one of the main professional engineering bodies in Nigeria argues, “There is a Nigerians in Diaspora Organisation based in U.S., Europe and Asia. However, it is not clear how organised they are” (Interview, Lagos, December 2005). Furthermore, he reports that he is not aware of any organisations formed by diasporic engineers and contends, “It is doubtful if any contributions have so far been made by any such organisations”.

At a more local level, the Vice Chairman of the Ipaja/Ayobo Local Development Area in Lagos claims that the founders of Development Impact for Nigeria, a diaspora NGO that works locally, are exceptional among diasporans, lamenting, “We have so many people who are overseas but we don’t feel their impact over here” (Interview, Ipaja, September 2005). Concurring, a senior figure in Ipaja’s ‘traditional authorities’ bemoans that the “many” ‘sons and daughters’ of the kingdom based overseas have failed to organise themselves and have done “nothing” for community development in the ancestral homeland (Interview, Ipaja, August 2005). Similarly, a prominent figure in the associational life of Ukpenwa asserts that while her co-ethnics living overseas have formed associations in the UK and the US, their contribution to the development of the ancestral community has been “minimal” (Interview, Ukpenwa, October 2005). Indeed, while the ‘traditional ruler’ of Ukpenwa, the Obu of Ukpenwa, asserts that associations of Ukpenwans based overseas are “trying” to support development at ‘home’, he is unable to identify any tangible impact they have made (Interview, Ukpenwa, November 2005).

However, a few elites in Ukpenwa (who generally have friends and relatives in overseas diaspora organisations or have been engaged directly by such groups) are able to offer more insight into what one of their number describes as the “little contribution” of the organised Ukpenwan diaspora (Interview, Ukpenwa, November 2005). The oldest Ukpenwan overseas diaspora organisation, the Ukpenwa Development Union, Great Britain and Ireland, (UDU) founded in London in the 1940s, is not recalled to have sent any monetary or material remittances ‘home’ since it made a donation to the previous Obu’s palace and to a local orphanage sometime in the second half of the 1990s. The Ukpenwa Women’s Association UK (UWA), founded in London in 1992, is recognised among the transitionally aware in Ukpenwa as the Ukpenwan diaspora organisation to

have done the most to ‘remember’ ‘home’. The UWA’s local ‘patrons’ tend to highlight the association’s 2004 award of a scholarship to a local student that will fund her through to the completion of her secondary education. The Director of Ukpenwa’s General Hospital recalled that the UWA and a Ukpenwan association based in the US had donated some equipment in the past, although he was unsure of the precise details. He delegated to the Head of Nursing who confirmed, after I jogged her memory on the basis of what UWA members had told me, that the association had provided in 2002 a respiratory device for new-born babies, a large fridge for drug storage, and mosquito screens and bed curtains for the maternity unit. She also recalled that the Ukpenwan organisation based in the US had donated a second-hand incubator that did not work. However, the items provided by the UWA were “very useful” and “much appreciated”, she added (Interview, Ukpenwa, November 2005).

Furthermore, a senior official at the Wazobia State Library in Ukpenwa enthusiastically recounted the UWA’s provision of books, toys and furniture for the establishment of a children’s section, proclaiming it a “wonderful idea” for which they should be “sincerely congratulate[d]” (Interview, Ukpenwa, October 2005). However, he expressed disappointment that since the project was completed in 2002, the UWA had not been in contact or sent any further finance or materials for the upkeep of the section. Indeed, by the time I visited the library in October 2005, the section had fallen into disuse with half of the furniture having apparently broken and been removed and not a single book or toy remaining.

The only other transnational interventions made by the UWA also appear to have had a rather fleeting and ultimately limited impact at ‘home’. While there was no memory or record of the donation of clothes that the UWA apparently made to the Federal Psychiatric Hospital in Ukpenwa, the civil servant responsible for a government orphanage did recall that her institution had received some years ago a donation of clothes and toys from the association. Although the official expressed the orphanage’s gratitude for this diasporic benevolence, she was keen to stress that it was contributions from ‘home’-based individuals, socio-cultural organisations, women’s associations and the local branches of international service clubs such as Rotary and Lions upon which the institution “relied” in the absence of sufficient state funding (Interview, Ukpenwa, November 2005). Similarly, the director of the psychiatric hospital, who was confident that the institution had received no diasporic donations at all, emphasised the

importance of contributions made by local women's groups and service clubs. Indeed, one of the seven local branches of the Lions club in Ukpenwa had recently installed a borehole at the hospital and was in the process of constructing a new administrative annexe for the institution.

In the kingdom of Ayege, it is also clear that the organised diaspora based overseas is not seen to drive the progress of the homeland as globalising discourses of diaspora and development might hope and expect. Indeed, as in Ipaja and Ukpenwa, it is very apparent that the organised diaspora based overseas is considered to make a relatively modest contribution to the development of the ancestral community. As the Chairman of the Ayege Progress Committee (APC) asserts of overseas Omoyege organisations, "they could do more", adding diplomatically, "they are trying their best, [but] perhaps we would have liked more" (Interview, Ayege, November 2005). More bluntly, the General Chairman of a major occupational association in the kingdom contends, "they can do but little", asking rhetorically, "how many people can they assist?" (Interview, Ayege, December 2005). "We don't depend on the people outside to assist", he adds pointedly.

Indeed, the impact of overseas diaspora organisations is again such that knowledge of these groups and their attempts to contribute to 'home' extends little beyond those local elites who have friends or family as members or who are part of, or closely connected to, the 'traditional authorities'. Among these elites, the overseas Omoyege organisation most readily recalled is the Ayege National Progress Union (ANPU) branch based in Toronto, Canada. This association is noted as the overseas Omoyege organisation to have made by far the most effort to contribute to community development and the only one to have made a 'visible' or 'physical' impact at 'home'. ANPU Toronto has achieved this special recognition by virtue of the borehole it installed at one of the kingdom's three public hospitals in 1995 and the 'accommodation and recreation centre' it has been building for visiting members since 2001.

The other contributions made by ANPU Toronto have faded from the memory of even the transnationally knowledgeable at 'home'. However, the communal archive (constituted by APC documents and publications) records that when ANPU Toronto installed the borehole in 1995, the association also provided bedding to a local government health clinic and renovated the ceiling, windows, and electrics at the



maternity wing of Ayege General Hospital. The community archive also records that in 2000 ANPU Toronto donated N187,000 (c.US\$1,800/£1,200) towards the construction of the Oba's new, 'ultra-modern' palace. It is perhaps not surprising that this contribution was forgotten as it constituted only 1.6% of the N12million (c.US\$90,000/£55,000) which had been raised and expended by the APC on the palace by the time of its commissioning in 2003.

The couple of other contributions ANPU Toronto has made have been equally modest but generally appear to have been of rather less benefit. The community archive records that in both 1997 and 1998 the association made a shipment containing books for the APC's public library and computers and medical drugs and equipment for the APC to distribute to educational and health facilities in the kingdom. While the APC expressed gratitude at the time for the donated books, it found most of the computers to be "obsolete" and "beyond use", placing them in storage in the hope that one day a technician would be identified who could make them function (APC General Secretary, interview, Ayege, November 2005). Furthermore, staff at the General Hospital recalled after consulting their 'donations from the community' file that, on delivery, the bulk of the drugs provided by ANPU Toronto had already expired and that the majority of the equipment donated by the association did not function or was not useful and was put into storage, where it remains to this day. A member of staff advised that should any other overseas diaspora organisations wish to contribute, they should first consult the hospital about its needs and requirements.

ANPU London appears to have made even less of a positive impression at 'home'. With the Union not having executed a project with a 'visible' or 'physical' impact, it is not only its contributions that are in danger of being forgotten at 'home' but also its very existence. Indeed, as far as the APC General Secretary is aware, ANPU London no longer exists. Certainly, the organisation is not listed in the APC's current register of Omoyege organisations based at 'home' and 'abroad'. When I informed the General Secretary that ANPU London had re-formed in early 2004 after a debilitating split in 2000, he sceptically agreed to take my word for it, adding, "We are yet to feel their impact" (ibid).

Indeed, even among the transnationally aware, the only person to recall ANPU London by name and to express knowledge of its continued existence was the Oba. During his

annual summer holiday to the UK, the Oba usually meets with ANPU London and/or some of its members and on his 2005 visit he received on behalf of the community a £425 donation from the union. This represents the only contribution the union is recalled or recorded to have made since 2000. Even prior to its period of dormancy between 2000 and 2004, ANPU London appears to have contributed little to development at 'home'. In 1995, the union "made a donation to a handicapped Ayege indigene at the Lagos University Teaching Hospital" (APC document 1995) and remitted some finance to the APC to establish a scholarship fund for secondary school students in the kingdom. While the latter benevolence enabled the award of some prizes of N3,000, the Oba laments that the union's scholarship fund is no longer sufficient to make any meaningful disbursements. As he reported to ANPU London during his 2005 visit to the UK, the fund is in desperate need of replenishment.

The final ANPU London contribution recorded before the association's debilitating split in 2000 is a donation of N20,000 (c.US\$190/£125) made that year towards the construction of the Oba's new, 'ultra-modern' palace. This pledge constituted less than 0.2% of the N12million raised for the project. The other interventions ANPU London members recall the union making sometime prior to 2000, namely, a donation to the APC's Ayege Vanguard 'security committee', the sending of some books for the APC library and a financial contribution towards the treatment of a local victim of an acid attack, were not recollected or recorded at 'home'.

Like those made by ANPU London and ANPU Toronto, the contributions of other overseas Omoyege organisations are rather modest and appear to have made little impact in the collective memory of 'communal effort' at 'home'. The Oba was alone in recalling that during his 2005 holiday to the UK the Ayege National Development Association UK, which broke away from ANPU London in 2004, gave him £200 to donate to the community development fund. The APC General Secretary was alone in remembering that ANPU France once provided some bed linen to one of the hospitals in Ayege. He was also alone in rather vaguely recalling, "There was a time a group, I think from America, decided to give scholarships to the secondary school children" (Interview, Ayege, November 2005). The communal archive records that this contribution was made in 2003 by ANPU Houston, Texas, USA. And the APC General Secretary was again alone in recounting that "a group in America" once donated two computers, both of which are still in use, one in the APC Secretariat and the other in the

Oba's office (ibid). The communal archive reveals that this contribution was made in 2002 by ANPU Maryland, USA.

The communal archive also reveals that in 1997 ANPU New York, USA, donated N200,000 (c.US\$2,400/£1,500) towards the APC's 'headline' project, the construction of Ayege's town hall. However, it is hardly surprising that this collective transnational contribution was not recalled even among the transnationally aware as it constituted only 0.5% of the N40 million the APC had raised and spent on the hall as of 2003. There was, though, some recollection of ANPU New York's donations to the APC's library. A member of the library's staff recounts that a few years ago some money for the purchase of books was sent by "our people in America" (Interview, Ayege, November 2005). Indeed, the communal archive records that INA New York donated US\$1,250 to the library in 1996 and continued its support for the institution with two further contributions, sending US\$1,000 in both 1997 and 1999. However, while the librarian asserts that this benevolence was "very helpful" in stocking the library, he reports that by far the most important contributions to the institution come from local organisations and individuals, especially local notables such as the Ayege's oldest high chief who is recorded and widely recognised as the initiator and principal funder of the library.

***"We don't depend on the people outside to assist": the importance of local benevolence and the 'internal diaspora'***

In the territorial imagining of the kingdom of Ayege, as in those of many other geo-ethnic formations in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa (see for example, Onwubu 1975; Trager 2001; Uduku 2002; Mercer et al 2008), to be 'abroad' or 'in diaspora' is not necessarily to be beyond the borders of the state but simply to be beyond the boundaries of the ancestral, geo-ethnic homeland. For Omoyeges and many other geo-ethnic groups in Nigeria, to reside beyond the 'home' community in another Nigerian settlement such as Lagos or Ibadan is to be just as much 'abroad' or 'in diaspora' as it is to be based in London or New York. This perspective is entirely compatible with academic notions of diaspora which, as we saw in Chapter 2, overwhelmingly tend to define the diasporic condition in relation to an *ethnically*-defined homeland rather than a merely politically-defined state of origin. Consequently, the prevailing academic understanding of diaspora allows for the diasporic condition to be made possible by simply crossing the

boundary of one's geo-ethnic 'homeland' even if this does not simultaneously involve crossing the borders of one's 'home' state. The diasporic condition is therefore attainable not just beyond, but also within, the territory of the state of origin. While Mercer et al (2008) have usefully proposed the term 'domestic diaspora' to describe ethnic diasporas formed within states of origin, I employ instead the notion of the 'internal diaspora' as it highlights the role of what are conventionally termed 'internal migrants' in the production and maintenance of these diasporas.

Significantly, there is good reason to think that internal migrants and the internal diasporas that they can produce carry much significance for the development of their 'home' communities. Firstly, while reliable data or even rough estimates appear to be completely lacking, it is clear that internal migration in Nigeria is of a considerable magnitude, certainly compared to international migration from the country which involves no more than a very small proportion of the country's 140 million-strong population<sup>1</sup> (Change Institute 2009). As de Haas (2006, p6) asserts, "Due to its sheer population size, internal migration occurring in Nigeria is massive compared to the relatively modest international out-migration". Furthermore, there is a substantial and long established literature on Nigeria and other African countries that charts the contributions internal migrants have made to their 'home' communities since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially through the 'hometown associations' and 'ethnic unions' that they form in their urban centres of residence and the community development organisations that they support back in their rural homelands (Coleman 1958, 1994; Sklar 1963; Aronson 1971; Melson and Wolpe 1971; Smock 1971; Ekeh 1975, 1992; Ahanotu 1982; Barkan et al 1991; Osaghae 1994, 1995; Vaughan 1995; Honey and Okafor 1998; Ikelegbe 2001a,b; Smith 2001; Trager 2001; Abbott 2002; Adejumbi 2004; Ukiwo 2005).

Indeed, in identifying the most important contributors to communal development in Ayege, records and respondents in the kingdom point not to Omoyege diaspora organisations based overseas but rather to Omoyege organisations and individuals based in Ayege itself and its 'internal diaspora' within Nigeria. For example, in tracing the development of the kingdom, the APC-sponsored history of Ayege, published in 1994, makes no mention of any Omoyege organisations based overseas but devotes much attention to the multifarious and important contributions made by a plethora of

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.population.gov.ng/2006\\_final\\_results/nationafinal.pdf](http://www.population.gov.ng/2006_final_results/nationafinal.pdf)

voluntary associations, such as 'social clubs', 'church societies', 'trade guilds' and 'cooperatives', based in the kingdom itself. The only collective diasporic contributions that are celebrated in this 'official' communal history are those made by the ANPU branches formed by Omoyege migrants and descendents residing in urban centres within Nigeria, most notably Lagos, Abuja, Ibadan, Kaduna, Jos, Zaria, and the capital of Iroko State, Lagbara. Tellingly, it is Nigerian towns and cities such as these, rather than London, New York or Toronto, that are most readily identified at 'home' as the key nodes of the 'Omoyege diaspora' and the most import sources of individual and collective communal benevolence from 'abroad'.

In records and recollections at 'home', 'traditional' elites in Ayege and individuals and associations based in the extended Omoyege community<sup>2</sup> within Nigeria are credited with coming together to establish over the course of the 21st century the kingdom's two main public hospitals, thirteen of its forty or so primary schools, and eight of its dozen or so secondary schools. Prominent Omoyeges based in Ayege and its 'internal diaspora' are lauded for establishing in recent years a number of highly regarded private schools and hospitals in the kingdom. And continuing another long-standing tradition of Omoyege 'self-help', local communal associations and notables win praise for stepping in for a negligent state by financing repairs and extensions to Ayege's road network. Furthermore, Omoyege 'youth' associations based in the kingdom are commended for making a vital contribution to such 'communal efforts' to maintain infrastructure, volunteering their labour to repair roads and bridges, clear drainage channels and reinstall electricity supply lines.

Associations and wealthy individuals in the extended Omoyege community within Nigeria are also noted for providing many scholarships, awarding them far more consistently and in much greater numbers than Omoyege organisations based overseas. For example, ANPU Lagbara maintains a N110,000 secondary school scholarship fund that enables the union to make two significant awards every year. Furthermore, as one of the many 'social clubs' formed by 'traditional' and educated elites in Ayege, the Leaders' Club has alone awarded more scholarships than all overseas Omoyege

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<sup>2</sup> Here I invoke Berry's (1985) work on the urban-rural ties of Yoruba migrants in Nigeria and her use of the term 'extended community'. In this conception, a hometown community includes not only its 'indigenes' based in the hometown itself but also its 'indigenes' resident in other urban centres within Nigeria.

organisations put together, providing 11 awards to Omoyege university students in Nigeria.

Organisations in the extended Omoyege community within Nigeria are further lauded for creating and supporting livelihood opportunities for indigenes in Ayege. A diverse range of Omoyege occupation and trade guilds in the kingdom offer apprenticeships and rotating credit to members and the Lagos-based Ayege Economic Forum (AEF) has pooled the resources and contacts of its wealthy and influential membership to find jobs for over 100 of their co-ethnics. Furthermore, the AEF is also widely applauded for significantly increasing the capital base of Ayege's community bank, enabling the extension of micro-credit to many more local indigenes. And most notably, the AEF has joined with wealthy members of the 'traditional authorities' to purchase from the state government Ayege's only major industrial plant, the plan being to 'resuscitate' the currently 'moribund' facility to provide employment for the kingdom's indigenes.

The importance of individuals and organisations based in Ayege and its diaspora within Nigeria is particularly apparent at the annual Ayege Day fundraising event. Instituted in 1989, this festival is regarded as critical to Ayege's progress as it has come to constitute the main source of finance for the 'communal effort' driven and coordinated by the Ayege Progress Committee (APC). Indeed, as the executive arm of the kingdom's 'traditional authorities', the APC deploys communal funds generated at Ayege Day in major 'self-help' initiatives, such as contesting land disputes on behalf of the kingdom, organising security against 'armed robbers', maintaining and repairing public infrastructure and constructing prestigious communal edifices such as the Oba's 'ultra-modern' palace and the imposing town hall. Significantly, an analysis of the donations made at the eleven Ayege Days between 1992 and 2004 for which data is available reveals that of the total raised each year, an average of nearly 30% comes from voluntary associations based in Ayege itself or its diaspora within Nigeria and an average of nearly 50% comes from individual donors, the overwhelming majority of whom are based in the kingdom or the 'internal diaspora'. Furthermore, an average of nearly 11% of the annual total raised at Ayege Day comes from local government, local schools, local and national businesses and neighbouring communities. This means that, on average, nearly 90% of the total amount raised at Ayege Day comes from individuals, voluntary associations, organisations, institutions and communities based

within Ayege itself or other locations within Nigeria. Indeed, on average, Omoyege organisations based overseas contribute less than 11% of the total raised at Ayege Day.

Significantly, even organised overseas diasporans themselves contend their associations make a rather limited contribution to development at 'home'. As Mrs Obafemi of ANPU London reflects, "I wouldn't be foolish enough to say that, 'OK, ANPU London plays a major role in the development, in the running of things in Ayege', no, we just contribute what we can according to what we have and we aspire to do more, [...]" (Interview, London, July 2005). Furthermore, Mrs Obafemi is far from alone in also arguing that associations based in Nigeria are doing more to contribute to the progress of the ancestral homeland; "Now when we talk about ANPU, I hope you realise that it's not just the London branch alone, there are ANPUs in Nigeria, some are active there, Lagos and so on, some of them even play bigger roles than what ANPU London is doing". As a fellow member laments of ANPU London, "it's not performing the way most ANPU back home are performing" (Interview, London, July 2005). Like many organised diasporans, ANPU London members therefore have little choice but to content themselves with making what one of their number describes as "our little impact" (Interview, London, July 2005).

### **Influencing progress from afar? Collective political transnationalism and its limits**

As we saw in Chapter 5, some diaspora organisations, particularly those explicitly grounded in sub-national, geo-ethnic identities, attempt to lobby the 'home' state to attend to the particular needs and desires of their respective communities of origin. However, while such organisations often see this mode of 'political transnationalism' as a key element of their border-spanning activities and sometimes suggest that they have some potentially useful contacts strategically located in the Nigerian state, they tend to doubt their ability to exert any meaningful influence on behalf of their ancestral homelands. For example, reflecting on ANPU London's attempts to encourage government officials at 'home' to ensure that the development of Ayege is supported by the Nigerian state, an active founding member of the Union laments, "there's nothing much you can do from here to influence them, we can only advise". Indeed, no ANPU London members could identify an instance where they believed that they had successfully turned the gaze and munificence of the Nigerian state towards their ancestral kingdom.

Similarly, the President of the Wazobia State Union (WSU) expresses considerable doubt about the efficacy of its attempts to lobby and influence the Nigerian state on behalf of UK-based 'hometown associations' and 'ethnic unions' representing various communities in Wazobia State. Despite enjoying official recognition from, and direct channels of communication with, both the Nigeria High Commission in the UK and the Wazobia State Government at 'home', the President of the WSU contends:

[...T]hey do listen sometimes but, to answer directly, it all depends. Like if the issues are such that there no political consequences, then they can ignore [them]. [...] If there are issues of political consequence then obviously they will have to address them but typical politicians, they only address issues when they think it's of any political advantage or concern. So take for instance we, the Wazobia State Union, did, some years ago, ask for a plot of land in Ukenwa to convert into a theme park. [...] The State Government promised they would do that but we're still waiting! [Laughs] For them, there's not any political expedience so they haven't done anything about it. So it all depends, I mean, we can only do what we can and that's it. (Interview, London, June 2006)

Indeed, it is widely felt that that the border-spanning influence geo-ethnic diaspora organisations are able to exert on behalf of their communities of origin is at the mercy of the interests of 'home'-based politicians and officials. The president of a union representing diasporans hailing from a state in south-east Nigeria bemoans that gubernatorial incumbents and aspirants from the 'home' state are always keen to be "hosted" by the union when they visit the UK seeking votes and campaign funds in the build-up to elections (Interview, London, May 2005). However, he bemoans that once these politicians retain or assume office, they are "not interested" in engaging with members of the union. Indeed, he decries that when members have attempted to visit incumbent governors, they have been "treated like shit".

Even diaspora organisations that have displayed exceptional levels of political activism on behalf of their ancestral communities express profound frustration at the degree of influence they have been able to exert from afar on the Nigerian state. Seeking to combat the economic and environmental exploitation of her "homeland", the oil-producing Niger Delta, Mrs Ikendu, the director of the London-based NGO Nigerian Women for Development (NWD), stands out in terms of the scope and intensity of the border-spanning lobbying she has been able to coordinate through her organisation



since its formation in 1994. From NWD's base in London, Mrs Ikendu has forged close contact with the local Member of Parliament, met both Queen Elizabeth II and Prime Minister Tony Blair, corresponded with Pope John Paul II, and engaged the Foreign Office, Commonwealth Secretariat, Commission for Africa, Amnesty International and the Shell oil company. On visits to Nigeria, Mrs Ikendu has met with Shell, a senator, a presidential advisor, a former Presidential candidate, and the former military president General Babangida.

In 2002, she even joined over 3000 "grass root women" in staging peaceful protests outside the operational headquarters of Shell and Chevron in her native state in the Niger Delta (Interview, London, June 2005). While the women had hoped to dialogue with representatives of the oil companies, they were met instead by the tear gas, boots, whips, and rifle butts of a combined deployment of mobile police and soldiers. For Mrs Ikendu, the most tangible result of her participation in the protest was the prominent horsewhip scars she acquired across her upper back. "Once again, the women lost to the oil giant operating with impunity in the Niger Delta", she laments (NWD document 2005). Indeed, despite all the lobbying and activism in which NWD has engaged at 'home' and 'abroad', Mrs Ikendu frequently questions the extent to which the organisation has been able to influence oil companies, the international community and the Nigerian state to end what she sees as the economic exploitation, environmental degradation, political marginalisation and brutal militarisation of her ancestral homeland. Reflecting on a meeting she had with a presidential advisor in Abuja, Mrs Ikendu wonders, "how did the people of the Niger Delta benefit from my efforts through the Chief to abate the repression and killing in the region?" (NWD document 2006). Deeply frustrated by the limited success of NWD's 'political transnationalism', Mrs Ikendu concluded that positive change will be effected in the Delta only when it has more responsible and transparent leaders. This was why she came to make an ultimately unsuccessful bid to be elected governor of one of the states in the region in the 2007 elections.

Despite representing a highly strategic node of what was, at one time, the internationally most recognised Niger Delta protest movement, the coordinator of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) Europe also expresses deep frustration at the extent to which his organisation has been able to challenge from afar the exploitation of the region and its resources. While he argues that this London-based

branch became “the centre of MOSOP operations” and “kept MOSOP going” between mid-1994 and mid-1998 when the military regime of President Abacha brutally suppressed the ‘home-based ‘parent’ body, he bemoans that MOSOP Europe has been unable to do more to help the movement recover the political voracity it lost with the state execution in 1995 of nine of its ‘home’-based leaders, especially the charismatic and internationally acclaimed writer Ken Saro-Wiwa (Interview, London, May 2005). Indeed, he regrets that the European branch has been unable to utilise its strategic location to prevent the Ogoni cause from sliding down the agendas of the international community and the Nigerian state. Consequently, he decries, the human rights abuses, political marginalisation and environmental degradation that MOSOP sought to counter on behalf of the Ogoni and the Niger Delta are as bad as, and in some ways worse than, they ever were.

***The view from the ‘hometown’: the limits of collective political transnationalism and the influence of the ‘internal diaspora’ and local agency***

Diasporans’ doubts about the efficacy of their organised attempts to lobby the Nigerian state on behalf of communities of origin are very much confirmed by co-ethnics at ‘home’. In Ayege, for example, members of the ‘traditional authorities’ and ordinary citizens alike were unable to identify any instances where they knew or felt that an organisation of Omoyeges based overseas had been able to influence the ‘government’ to recognise the kingdom in the disbursement of state power and resources. Tellingly, the Executive Chairman of Ayege/Asiki Local Government expresses notable indifference to the advances of even the most established and supposedly well respected of such organisations, ANPU London; “The people in London, they’ve sent invitations for me to attend their meeting so many times, but I never find time to go” (Interview, Ayege, November 2005).

Significantly, when it comes to identifying the most effective associational agents of communal lobbying, leaders and citizens of Ayege point consistently to Omoyege organisations based in the ancestral kingdom and its extended community within Nigeria rather than those based overseas. Given their status as the ‘apex’ institutions responsible for the development of Ayege, it is the Oba-in-council and its executive arm, the APC, that are held up as the most important torch-bearers of communal interest. From their base in the kingdom, the ‘traditional authorities’, as they are

collectively known, maintain Omoyege pressure on the local, state, and federal governments with petitions and the sending and receiving of delegations and are generally given the ultimate credit for any benevolence that the state affords Ayege. Indeed, it is the 'traditional authorities' that are seen to lead and coordinate from the kingdom all the communal lobbying efforts undertaken by its citizens and associations based at 'home' and 'abroad'.

In driving the campaign to assert Ayege's needs and desires, members of the 'traditional authorities' cite the ANPU branch in Lagbara as the most important organisational node in the Omoyege network of communal claims-making. Emphasising the political significance of ANPU Lagbara, the General Secretary of the APC asserts, "there is nothing that we do in the town here that the Lagbara branch are not consulted on, because they are in the state capital, they are very close to the government" (Interview, Ayege, November 2005). Indeed, given its highly strategic location in the capital of Iroko State and with a high proportion of its members working as civil servants in the State Government, ANPU Lagbara is widely seen as the Omoyege organisation most able to influence government officials to attend to the development of Ayege.

Furthermore, ANPU Lagbara is lauded for making the most of its advantageous position, producing tangible results in the quest to attract the gaze and munificence of the state. For example, in "assist[ing] the town to have its fair share of whatever is going on in the state" (ibid), ANPU Lagbara is credited with persuading the State Government to increase the quota of new boreholes allocated to Ayege in a recent water provision programme. ANPU Lagbara attracts particular praise for playing an apparently decisive role in encouraging the State Government to promote Ayege's 'traditional ruler' from a 'Grade B' to a 'Grade A' Oba, ensuring his official recognition as an educated monarch and enabling him to assume in 2003 the prestigious and influential role of Chairman of the Iroko State Council of Obas. ANPU Lagbara is also seen to make an especially significant contribution to the political power and progress of Ayege by assisting Omoyeges to obtain positions in the Iroko State civil service; "that is a major something", contends the APC General Secretary, "that one is not quantifiable" (ibid). In such ways, then, ANPU Lagbara is considered central in activating and expanding the communal lobbying networks through which the 'traditional authorities' seek to promote the needs and desires of Ayege in the contest for state largesse.

After ANPU Lagbara, it is another organisation located in the extended Omoyege community within Nigeria that is most celebrated for the political influence it is able to exert on behalf of Ayege. Based in Lagos but with some members located in other major nodes of the Omoyege diaspora within Nigeria, principally Abuja, Lagbara, Ibadan, and Port Harcourt, the Ayege Economic Forum (AEF) has begun to attract notable acclaim for the increasingly important communal influence it has been able to exert on the state since its formation in 2001. Constituted by prominent, “middle-aged” Omoyege professionals and lauded as the organisation to “gradually receive the baton of power” from the elderly “Babas” of the APC (APC document 2002), the AEF espouses a discourse of “economic empowerment” and has a key strategy to strengthen and broaden significantly the networks through which the development needs and desires of Ayege can be asserted and pursued (AEF Chairman, interview, Lagos, December 2005).

As the Forum’s founder and Chairman (and the Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of one of Nigeria’s biggest commercial enterprises), Mr Adesanya argues that the AEF possesses both the “economic power” and “network” to better champion the Omoyege cause, especially at the state and federal government levels (*ibid*). Indeed, the AEF is noted for having utilised its greater financial and political capital to “place” over 100 Omoyeges in senior, strategic commercial and governmental positions. The AEF also wins much praise at ‘home’ for funding the election campaigns of Omoyeges who wish to stand for political office. With the assertion of Ayege’s needs and desires in mind, all Omoyeges whose professional or political progress has been supported by the AEF are obliged to reciprocate by employing their influential positions to the communal good. Indeed, Mr Adesanya presents AEF beneficiaries with a clear challenge; “I have built you up but what are you doing for the community?” (*ibid*).

Furthermore, the AEF has itself flexed its economic and political muscle for the direct benefit of Ayege. Most notably, the Forum utilised Mr Adesanya’s ‘very close’ relationship with the Governor of Iroko State to ensure that the ownership of Ayege’s only major industrial facility was transferred from the Iroko State Government to the AEF on behalf of the community. Members of the ‘traditional authorities’ gladly acknowledge the influence of the AEF in winning control for the kingdom of this currently ‘moribund’ but potentially highly productive and profitable economic infrastructure. Moreover, they enthusiastically endorse the Forum’s plan to favour Omoyeges in the issuing of share options in the facility, thereby entrenching

‘indigenous ownership’ of the plant and ensuring that it is successfully ‘resuscitated’ in a way that provides employment for Omoyege workers.

Having demonstrated an ability to influence such powerful government figures as the Governor of Iroko State, the AEF is increasingly finding it less of a challenge to lobby on behalf of the community less senior but nonetheless important officials such as the Chairman of the Ayege/Asiki Local Government, a man with whom ANPU London has not even been able to secure a meeting. As Mr Adesanya, the AEF’s Chairman, asserts with a wry smile, “We’ve gotten to a point today where we say, ‘Mr. Local Government Chairman, we want to see you’, and he will worry about why we’re calling him” (ibid). It is no surprise, then, that the AEF displays an almost supreme confidence in its growing political influence while ANPU London expresses only grave doubts and deep frustration about the efficacy of its efforts to lobby the state from afar. Indeed, it is to Lagbara, Lagos and Abuja that the leaders and citizens of Ayege point when identifying the most important nodes of the organised network through which the kingdom’s needs and desires are impressed upon the state. Tellingly, no mention is made of London, New York or any other location in the organised Omoyege diaspora based overseas.

Significantly, Ayege’s ‘traditional authorities’ and ordinary citizens even credit associations based in the kingdom itself, particularly its elite ‘social clubs’, with greater political influence than Omoyege organisations based overseas. The Ayege Pacesetters, for example, is especially noted for consistently employing the “talents and positions”<sup>3</sup> of its members to play a significant role in encouraging the state to assist with the provision of a number of important amenities in the kingdom over the years, including its ‘model’ farm and post office. The political importance of associations based within the ancestral homeland relative to those based overseas is particularly apparent in Ukpenwa.

Unlike Ayege, Ukpenwa is not a relatively small and isolated rural kingdom but a notable ‘metropolis’ that enjoys the status of being a state capital and a major commercial hub of national significance. Consequently, while Ayege sees many, if not most, of its educated citizens leave the kingdom to pursue their aspirations in the bigger towns and cities of Nigeria, Ukpenwa offers its educated elites far more socio-economic and political opportunities and therefore retains at ‘home’ the bulk of its wealthiest and

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<sup>3</sup> APC document 1994

most well-connected 'sons and daughters'. When it comes to asserting communal needs and desires, then, the leaders and citizens of Ukpenwa do not join those of Ayege in looking primarily to diasporic co-ethnics and their organisations based in other urban centres within Nigeria but rather turn to the elite associations formed and based in the ancestral homeland itself.

As in Ayege, however, leaders and citizens in Ukpenwa certainly do not consider their organised co-ethnics overseas as a political force in making communal claims on the state. Indeed, 'indigenes' in Ukpenwa, as in Ayege, do not report any instances where organisations of their co-ethnics based overseas have successfully lobbied the state on behalf of the ancestral homeland. In contrast, just as organisations formed by the Omoyege diaspora within Nigeria are seen in Ayege to have an established and unrivalled record of exerting political influence on behalf of the kingdom, elite communal associations based in Ukpenwa itself are credited with a long history of being the most important and successful lobbyists for the progress and development of the homeland.

Ever since the early 1920s, a whole series of Ukpenwa 'unions' have risen from the city to assert its interests, especially in times of perceived communal disadvantage. Indeed, what are today the two most prominent and powerful Ukpenwa organisations, the Ukpenwa Masquerade Society (UMS) and the Ukpenwa Culture and Progress Association (UCPA), were formed in the early 1980s with a key aim to lobby the Federal Government to create a new Wazobia State in which Ukpenwa and its co-ethnic hinterland would be separated from their increasingly dominant geo-ethnic neighbours, most especially the demographically and politically ascendant Oghedus. Having ultimately triumphed in this major campaign, the UMS and UCPA have remained focussed on the "militant defence of Ukpenwa interest" (UMS document 2004).

Indeed, the Vice President of the UMS, Elder Chief Johnson, a senior Wazobia State civil servant and a prominent figure in Ukpenwa affairs, argues that although the two associations are described as "cultural organisations", they are, in practice, primarily "a kind of political movement, underground" (Interview, Ukpenwa, November 2005). "[W]e just use the culture to cover it", he adds. Indeed, in describing the activities and significance of Ukpenwa's two "paramount" 'cultural organisations', Elder Johnson

first highlights their ability to establish communal networks through which Ukpewwan needs and desires can be asserted in the Nigerian polity:

Well, politically, let me start from politically. If we have somebody from here who is contesting any national post or whatever, we have to rally round that person because he's our own person. The time was here when some people from Oghedu came to contest the Senate with people from here and we stood and rallied round our people and mobilised people to vote for our candidate and our candidate won. So, politically, that is what we can do.

Concordantly, when describing the endeavours of the UCPA, Dr. Ikunwa, a founding father of the organisation, also prioritises what he terms "political contributions" (Ikunwa 2004, a history of the UCPA; Interview, Ukpewwan, October 2005). Mirroring Elder Johnson, Dr. Ikunwa, a local medical practitioner, university lecturer, and Ukpewwan High Chief, details how this "cultural NGO" has supported members in their quests to win political office, achieving many successes at the local, state, and federal levels, including his own appointment as a federal minister in the 1980s. Highlighting how this "fraternity policy" has produced significant and tangible benefits for Ukpewwan and its people, Dr. Ikunwa details how the group's advancement of his own political career saw the promotion of fellow UCPA members and other co-ethnics to strategic positions in the state apparatus and witnessed the completion of major infrastructural projects in Ukpewwan and its co-ethnic hinterland. For Dr Ikunwa, the mutually-supported political progress of UCPA members is critical to the efficacy of the "pressure group activities" the organisation undertakes on behalf of Ukpewwan, the crowning glory of which remains its leading role in the successful campaign to persuade the Federal Government to create Wazobia State and 'free' Ukpewwan from Oghedu domination. Indeed, it was through this momentous victory in "the battle for Ukpewwan" that the UMS and UCPA established their lasting reputation among Ukpewwans both at 'home' and 'abroad' as the most influential associational agents in the assertion of Ukpewwan's interests.

Clearly, organisations formed and based in Ukpewwan itself are lauded as the most important and influential collective agents in pressing upon the state the city's needs and desires. While these organisations are widely celebrated for the memorable and hugely significant political 'victories' they have won for Ukpewwan, associations of Ukpewwans based overseas barely register in the communal consciousness and are not

known to have exerted any influence on the state to the tangible benefit of the 'homeland'. Similarly, we have seen in Ayege that overseas Omoyege organisations are not credited with any successes in lobbying the state on behalf of the kingdom, leaders and citizens pointing instead to the major concessions won for the community by elite 'social clubs' based at 'home' and, most especially, Omoyege organisations based in other towns and cities within Nigeria. Indeed, it is overwhelmingly apparent that, in both Ayege and Ukpenwa, the most important and effective organisational agents of communal lobbying are seen to be based within and not beyond the borders of Nigeria. As members of London-based associations grounded in Omoyege, Ukpenwan and other ancestral identities fear, diaspora organisations based overseas appear to be rather marginal in the assertion of communal needs and desires.

***Shaping the Nigerian project? Collective political transnationalism and its limits at the national level***

Diaspora organisations based overseas are seen to have a limited ability to lobby and influence the state from afar not only in relation to asserting local community interests but also in terms of shaping national policies and programmes of 'progress' and 'development'. For example, Mr Ekpwen, a political science graduate and a senior federal civil servant based in Abuja, contends that the influence of diaspora organisations today simply does not compare to that exerted by their forebears during the post-World War II intensification of the movement for Nigerian independence. Citing the West African Students' Union and *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*, founded in 1925 and 1945 respectively, Mr Ekpwen argues that it was through these diaspora organisations formed in London that a new generation of nationalist leaders and parties emerged. Indeed, it is well documented that when these nationalists returned 'home' with the organisational structures they had created in London, they came to play key roles in drumming-up nationalist sentiment and forming the political parties that set Nigeria irresistibly on the path to independence (see also Coleman 1958; Sklar 1963; Adi 1994). Today, Mr Ekpwen asserts, it is impossible to identify an organised diasporic influence of anywhere near such importance. For him, this has much to do with diasporic 'exposure' no longer carrying the same aura and authority back at 'home'. Prior to independence, he suggests, "townspeople" would flock to Lagos to see-off one of their lucky "sons" going to London, maintaining a "vigil" until, having gained an education and "become like the white man", he returned to be greeted as "some kind of



god” (Interview, Abuja, August 2005). The UK today, he continues, is merely another land that many Nigerians can and have visited and whose inhabitants, and the Nigerians who have lived among them, are “only human”.

Mrs Akinyemi, the Lagos-based director of one of the most prominent networks of civil society organisations in Nigeria, also sees significant organised diasporic influence in national affairs as a phenomenon of the past, albeit the more recent past. Indeed, she notes that a wave of diasporic collective action played a role in the intensified pro-democracy movement that rose in Nigeria when presidential elections were annulled by the military regime of General Babangida on June 12th 1993:

We were able to do a lot of very collaborative things during the military because [...] we had a common enemy. We were able to organise a branch of NADECO [National Democratic Coalition] outside. They as a group were able to engage the British government so there was high level interventions that took place and someone like me wrote to the Queen saying I would relinquish my father’s MBE [Member of the Order of the British Empire] in parliament if we didn’t have sanctions when June 12th happened. So we were able to engage the [British] government directly and get a lot of positive response because they could feel our pain, they could see that truly this was affecting just about everybody [...]. (Interview, Lagos, October 2005)

However, Mrs Akinyemi rues that once the transition to democracy was finally secured in 1999, the international community became much less willing to listen to any “anti-government elements”. Furthermore, she laments, the defeat of the “common enemy” represented by the military also precipitated, both at ‘home’ and in diaspora, a fracturing and weakening of Nigerian civil society as its energy and focus dissipated to pursue a range of different national issues and divergent sub-national interests. For Mrs Akinyemi, while civil society in Nigeria has in recent years made strides to again cooperate, build consensus, and form coalitions that can engage the state on major, inter-related national issues, civil society in diaspora has remained fragmented and particularistic.

Consequently, she bemoans that, since the return of civilian rule in 1999, there has been very little evidence of any organised diasporic interventions aimed at supporting national political projects such as the entrenchment of democracy, good governance, and economic reform. With strong diasporic connections herself, she complains that, in

general, diasporans are not “looking at the big picture” or “addressing one big thing that could really make a difference to the country”. She expresses particular disappointment that there is little tangible diasporic support for major, ‘home’-based civil society initiatives aimed at reforming the Nigerian state, contending:

[T]hey must find a way of linking with [civil society] networks that are here, [...], [and] campaigns like ‘Publish What You Pay’, coalitions like the Freedom of Information Coalition which is now driving the Freedom of Information Bill – those are big things that can make big differences and it doesn’t take much to send emails, send information, just share, that’s maybe all that’s needed. In terms of engineering huge changes, that can be done if they are organised out there in the diaspora because they can see what’s going on.

Indeed, Mrs Akinyemi suggests that diasporans could come together and “assist the anti-corruption drive” by tracking the international movements of Nigerian leaders and making them feel that they can no longer act with impunity when travelling abroad:

[The diaspora] should make the people who are governing us shudder if they think of going abroad. They should be shuddering that, “oh God, when we get there, what’s gonna happen?” There should be people in Heathrow Airport, Gatwick Airport with banners saying, “Don’t come here!” That’s the kind of stuff we want them to be doing.

In calling for greater organised political engagement from the diaspora, Mrs Akinyemi argues that diasporic ‘professionals’ in particular could do much more to employ their status, positions and expertise to influence positive change in Nigeria:

[...] I’m afraid I don’t see enough of [...] professionals in the diaspora coming up with real, well thought out, strategic, well researched information and material for Nigerians [...]. [...] We need more information about how systems work. Our privatisation exercise is going on – let’s have a critique from our civil society out there. [...] We want a lot more criticism, you open the newspapers here, you don’t see much coming from the Nigerians in diaspora. [...] The resources are there, the connections are there, they’re in the international media, they can walk into the BBC and say, “we want to have a conference to talk about what’s happening in Nigeria, we want CNN there”, everybody will be there. [They can produce p]osition papers on this issue and that issue. [...] But they’re not organised, that’s the problem.

Significantly, diasporic professionals themselves often feel that they could and should do much more to organise in an attempt to engage and influence the nation-building

project of the Nigerian state. Indeed, it was partly a deep frustration with the apparent lack of diasporic collective involvement in the political affairs of 'home' that prompted a group of six UK-based Nigerian professionals to form in 1999 the diaspora NGO Development Impact for Nigeria (DIFN). With the motto "Doing Nothing is Not an Option", a central, founding aim of DIFN is to "encourage Nigerians living outside Nigeria to see themselves as active stakeholder[s] in poverty alleviation and community building in Nigeria" (DIFN documents, n.d.). In pursuing this aim, DIFN has challenged diasporans, particularly diasporic professionals, to heighten, re-orientate and better organise their engagements with the Nigerian state and its policies and programmes of progress. For example, at an 'information day' DIFN organised to discuss "how Nigerians in the UK can impact Nigeria's development" (DIFN event flyer, 2005), a trustee of the organisation addressed the audience of some 25 people, bemoaning:

If a Nigerian goes home and gets an audience with a politician, the first thing on his mind is getting a contract, not pressurising on social development issues. We have many doctors in the UK now, my cousin is one of them, but what are they doing to put pressure on the government about the state of the health system in Nigeria? It's time we professionals in diaspora came together and started getting politicians to address these development issues.

The very same concern that diasporic professionals are not doing enough to engage and influence the nation-building project of the Nigerian state was also central to the formation of the British Nigeria Law Forum (BNLF), which was launched in late 2002. Opening the BNLF's summer 2005 event in London, the Forum's Chair, Oba Nsugbe QC, emphasised to the 40 or so people in attendance that the organisation has a key objective to enable its members to have an input into major Nigerian government policy initiatives that would benefit from expert legal advice and opinion. "Nigerian lawyers here have been too quiet for too long", he declared. "Nigeria is going through a crucial stage", he continued; "there is no reason why lawyers here shouldn't be at the forefront of democratic and business reform in Nigeria". Buttressing his call to action on important national issues such as these, Mr Nsugbe later pressed members to submit opinion pieces to newspapers at 'home'. Concurring, a participant argued, "We need to start seeing ourselves as catalysts of change back home [...], we need to start speaking up!". "If we can speak as an organisation", he added, "we will have more influence than we can on our own".

The formation and objectives of organisations like DIFN and the BNLF clearly reflect an acknowledgement among diasporans that their collective efforts to shape the nation-building project of the Nigerian state have, until recently, been rather limited in both extent and efficacy. However, the establishment and aims of such organisations also highlight a growing diasporic desire to better organise in an attempt to influence more actively and effectively the national affairs of ‘home’. As the founding President of the Engineering Forum of Nigerians proclaims, its creation signals moves towards “building a cohesive Nigerian community especially among the professionals to enable us to have a greater impact as we seek to make input into Nigeria” (EFN event programme, 2005). Concurring, one of his fellow founding executives believes the formation of EFN represents a “political awakening to want to be involved in the process of development and making things happen for the demands of the population” (Interview, Lagos, September 2005).

*Opening a new space for diasporic influence? Collective transnational intervention and the diaspora engagement initiatives of the Nigerian state*

The (re)emergence of diasporic desires to contribute to the Nigerian project can be seen as both a response to, and a driver of, the creation of an emergent, border-spanning political sphere – a transnational space that has begun to be afforded to, and consciously carved out by, diasporic professionals in particular. As Ambassador Joe Keshi argues, the initiation in 2000 of the Federal Government’s diaspora engagement programme was a product not only of President Obasanjo’s whim but also of organised diasporic agitation for a greater role in the progress of the nation. Indeed, as the Nigerian Consul-General in Atlanta, USA, Ambassador Keshi was made very much aware of a diasporic desire to influence positive change at ‘home’:

When I got to the United States [...], as I reached out to the Nigerian community, [...] I sensed their deep concern for what was going on in the country and, at the same time, we could also see that they expressed a willingness, at a given time, to say something like, “Look, we are here, we can help” [...]. (Interview, Abuja, October 2005)

When Ambassador Keshi communicated these diasporic desires to the Federal Government at ‘home’, he found that the Presidency was itself thinking of seeking out diasporic support for its national reform programme. “At some point there was a convergence”, he recalls. There was, then, one of those moments of coherence between

diasporic desires and political interests at 'home' that, as we saw above, are often seen to be crucial to the success of transnational lobbying. At a pioneering meeting in Atlanta in September 2000, celebrated as the 'First Presidential Diaspora Dialogue', President Obasanjo declared to the gathering of some 3,700 diasporic Nigerians:

For here and now, Nigeria is taking the bold first step to enable Nigerians living outside the country to participate fully in the process of visioning, planning and pursuing the political well-being, the economic development and the sound governance of their country.  
(Obasanjo 2000)

Since this statement of intent was delivered from on high, the Nigerian state has gradually afforded diasporans, particularly diasporic professionals, channels through which they can seek individually and collectively to exert influence on the nation-building project at 'home'. With the provision of state funding to enable "take-off", Nigerians in Diaspora Organisation (NIDO) was officially established in North America in late 2001 and in Europe a year later. Centrally concerned with identifying Nigerians abroad who are "willing to offer their skills to assist Nigeria's developmental process" ([www.nidoeurope.org](http://www.nidoeurope.org)), NIDO has also been given some opportunities to address the state on behalf of the diaspora. The most notable of these was when the chairmen of the US and Europe branches were appointed by the Federal Government as the representatives of the US- and Europe-based diasporas at the fractious and ultimately unsuccessful National Political Reform Conference held in 2005. Furthermore, Dr Christopher Kolade, the dynamic and highly respected Nigeria High Commissioner to the UK, enthusiastically engaged and supported diasporic professionals and their associations, regularly attending their events and even arranging for them to meet with senior Federal Government officials visiting the UK, including President Obasanjo himself.

It is clear, then, that an emergent transnational political space is gradually being created by, and afforded to, diasporans, particularly diasporic professionals and their organisations. However, it is also clear that diasporans and their organisations have been granted little freedom to determine the precise nature of their embryonic engagement with the Nigerian state and its nation-building project. The Federal Government has sought to carefully configure the boundaries of the nascent transnational political realm it has afforded to its overseas nationals, not only by targeting professionals in particular but also by attempting to regulate the nature of any interventions diasporans might

attempt to make. Indeed, the emergent cross-border political engagement has been initiated very much on the state's own terms. Most notably, the Federal Government and National Assembly have stubbornly refused to satisfy calls for the introduction of diasporic voting. And as President Obasanjo made clear at the ground-breaking 'First Presidential Diaspora Dialogue' in Atlanta in September 2000, it is only diasporans with "high level marketable skills" and an interest in "participating positively" in his particular vision of Nigeria's progress that are welcome to join "our Nigerian Diaspora Movement" (Obasanjo 2000). Translating this presidential message more directly, an official at the Nigeria High Commission in the UK asserts, "The President said, 'look, come home and be part of development, become a part of the show, don't just stay there to criticise [...]'" (Interview, London, July 2005).

Indeed, at the Federal Government's pioneering diaspora engagement conference held in Abuja in July 2005, President Obasanjo made it abundantly clear that criticism was the last thing he wanted from the diaspora. Having celebrated in his keynote speech to the conference the skills, expertise, international connections, and investment capacities of diasporans, he railed against some of their writings on the Internet. Arguing that diasporic cyber-articles often "leave a lot to be desired" due to their "crass ignorance" and lack of "familiarity with policy", President Obasanjo asserted sharply:

Some in diaspora have been sceptical about our reform programme even when our development partners and other African countries praise them. Every government policy is dismissed or denigrated without reading the documents or asking the officials. The rejection of everything government does must stop [...].

Significantly, diaspora organisations that have been brought into the nascent transnational political sphere President Obasanjo began to open in Atlanta in 2000 appear to have heeded the presidential demand for uncritical cooperation. For example, at the Engineering Forum of Nigerians' 2006 'Spring Event' in London, an executive of the organisation requested that members of the more than 50-strong audience be "constructive" when directing questions to the speakers, which included a representative of the Nigeria High Commissioner to the UK and, from Nigeria, the Minister of State for Transport and the managing directors of six transport 'parastatals'. "We are not here to criticise the Nigerian government", he insisted.

It is unsurprising, then, that there is a strong sense among the relatively few diasporans who are aware of it that the embryonic transnational political space afforded by the Federal Government is more about legitimising than interrogating Obasanjo's regime and reforms. This is especially apparent in that electronic repository of opinion derided by President Obasanjo, where a profusion of comments and articles, especially from diasporans based in the US, dismiss as self-serving the Federal Government's transnational engagement efforts, particularly its creation and funding of NIDO. Dr Femi Ajayi (2005), for example, a prolific, Atlanta-based columnist on the Nigeria World website, describes NIDO as being in a "strong scrounging hold by the Federal Government of Nigeria". Similarly, Professor Mobolaji Aluko (2004), a Maryland-based essayist on another diasporic website, Nigerian Muse, asserts, "we should remember that NIDO is President Obasanjo's baby". And in an interview on the Nigeria Village Square website, Emeka Ugwuonye, a disaffected former chairman of NIDO Americas, concurs with the suggestion that the organisation is "an extension of the Nigerian government abroad" and rails that "most members of [the] NIDO board think their job is simply to sit down and guess the 'desires' of the government and try to satisfy them" (Akande 2004).

In both its conception by President Obasanjo and its reception by the relatively small proportion of overseas Nigerians who are aware of it, the Federal Government's emergent diaspora outreach programme is clearly seen to afford little space to the production of critical perspective or the exertion of radical influence. In the UK context, however, some active figures in diasporic associational life have recently sought to initiate the creation of an alternative, more open transnational political sphere with the inauguration in October 2005 of a new umbrella organisation for Nigerian associations in the country. Replacing the long factionalised and ineffective Nigerian National Union, the Central Association of Nigerians in the UK (CANUK) seeks to forge more political space not only for diaspora organisations that are not grounded in a professional identity but also for alternative visions of Nigeria's development.

Indeed, for Dr Ubejifor, a prime mover in the formation of the new organisation, CANUK offers a distinctly more inclusive and diverse associational and political space than NIDO. While he sees NIDO as "mostly a professional organisation" that is "government-linked", Dr Ubejifor contends that CANUK seeks to "encompass every Nigerian organisation in the UK" and aspires to be "independent" of the Nigerian state

(Interview, London, June 2006). Therefore, in addition to having secured at launch a diverse membership of 44 organisations, including ethnic and state unions and pan-Nigerian community groups alongside professional associations, CANUK has also established an “office outside the High Commission” and attempts to generate “its own sources of funding”. Consequently, Dr Ubejifor believes that this new umbrella organisation is not only better positioned than NIDO to represent to the Federal Government the manifold interests of the UK-based diaspora but is also more able to question the policies and programmes of the state; “it can criticise government, it can take a political stance if it wanted, oppose that of the government”. “It’s not that they are against the government or anything, if there’s no need to oppose anything they have to work with the government”, asserts Dr Ubejifor, adding, “but if there is a need to, then they have to make a stand”.

However, while Dr Christopher Kolade, the liberal-minded and avowedly democratic Nigerian High Commissioner to the UK, has actively encouraged and formally recognised CANUK, it remains to be seen whether the organisation’s diverse associations and potentially dissenting voices will be able to exert any tangible influence on the policies and programmes of the Federal Government. Certainly, Dr Ubejifor, a key player in the creation of CANUK and the President of the Wazobia State Union, is, as we saw earlier, rather sceptical about the ability of diaspora organisations to exert influence on government at ‘home’ even when official, institutionalised channels of communication exist. As noted above, Dr Ubejifor, like others, argues that the success of organised transnational lobbying is ultimately dependent on the interests of state actors in the ‘homeland’; “they only address issues when they think it’s of any political advantage or concern” (ibid). And with diasporans neither possessing the right to vote at ‘home’ from afar nor displaying the financial strength globalising discourses of diaspora and development might expect, there would appear to be very little incentive for politicians and state officials at ‘home’ to respond to diasporic opinions, concerns and desires. This is especially true given that those in power at ‘home’ enjoy the considerable political autonomy that comes from controlling Nigeria’s substantial oil wealth. Indeed, as long as Nigeria’s politics and progress are fuelled by oil, it would seem that diasporans and their organisations have little prospect of acquiring the necessary leverage to be in a position to exert meaningful influence on the nation-building project of the Nigerian state.



## Conclusion

Contrary to the expectations of celebratory discourses of diaspora and development, it is clear that the collective remittances and political transnationalism of London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations do not produce major transformative effects at 'home'. While these groups make monetary and material contributions to schools, hospitals and public infrastructure, this benevolence is overwhelmingly seen both in diaspora and at 'home' as rather modest and ultimately marginal. In contrast to findings in other transnational contexts around the world, there is no evidence of diaspora organisations themselves successfully establishing or sustaining health and education institutions, public infrastructure, 'productive' enterprises or micro-credit schemes. Furthermore, the limited collective transnational donations that are made are consistently seen to pale into relative insignificance compared to the benevolence of more local individuals and organisations based within Nigeria itself.

Similarly, while London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations attempt to exploit their strategic location in diaspora to influence 'progress' at 'home', it is clear that this political transnationalism achieves much less success than might be expected in globalising discourses of diaspora and development. Again, collective transnational intervention is seen both in diaspora and at 'home' to be a rather limited and marginal force in processes of development and change at 'home'. Even the Nigerian state's explicit opening of a transnational political sphere affords little space for the organised diaspora to voice its interests and desires and wield influence that might in some way change the futures of local communities and the wider nation. Indeed, from the perspective of local communities, the political influence wielded on their behalf by diaspora organisations based overseas is negligible; it is individuals and organisations based in the community itself and its 'internal diaspora' within Nigeria that are seen as the most effective voices for articulating and meeting local needs and aspirations.

It would seem, then, that if globalising discourses of diaspora and development are not to overplay the monetary, material and political importance of collective transnational intervention in processes of transformation at 'home', it is necessary for these discourses to afford much greater recognition to the benevolence and influence of individuals and organisations based within the country of origin itself. With the proliferating celebration of diaspora, there is a danger that development discourses will

again fall into the trap of effacing local agency in the process of reifying an 'external' agent as the primary source of progress. If states and international agencies wish to engage and support the actors that are the major funders and shapers of change, they cannot avoid dealing with the local. It may seem much easier to engage with the diaspora, located as it often is in major centres of global power and supposedly imbued with hegemonic visions of development, but it is not necessarily the most effective way of connecting with the drivers of transformation at 'home'. If globalising discourses of diaspora and development are to contribute to identifying and engaging these drivers, one of their most important contributions might be to do much more to highlight the role of 'internal diasporas' based within countries of origin. As we have seen, it is the 'internal diaspora', along with local individuals and organisations, that is for many communities by far and away the most important source of money, materials and political influence.

## **7. Transferring bright ideas and good behaviour? Collective social remittances and their limits**

### **Introduction**

While the collective remittances and political transnationalism of London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations may have a rather limited impact on progress in Nigeria, there remains the promise that these groups constitute a key channel for the transfer ‘home’ of new and developmentally-beneficial ideas, knowledge and practices acquired ‘abroad’. Indeed, as we saw in Chapter 2, the transnational transmission of what have come to be termed ‘social remittances’ is highlighted in globalising discourses of diaspora and development as one of the most important ways in which diasporans and their organisations produce notable transformative effects at ‘home’. Following Levitt’s (1998) original conception of social remittances, migrant ‘hometown associations’ have been identified as entities through which novel and ‘progressive’ information and capacities, such as “decision-making, organizational and management skills” (USAID 2004: 29), are transferred to local communities. Furthermore, with the expansion of Levitt’s conception, diaspora organisations, and diasporic professional associations in particular, are being lauded and engaged as channels for the remittance of innovative, high-level technical knowledge and expertise that can transform not only local communities but also entire nations.

However, contrary to the hopes and expectations of globalising discourses of diaspora and development, it would appear that there are significant limits to the extent to which London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations can be seen to remit new and developmentally-beneficial ideas and practices. At the local level, there is very little evidence of community-based diaspora organisations such as ‘hometown associations’ transmitting and instilling innovative ways of thinking or doing development. Reflecting their limited monetary and material contributions to, and marginal influence over, communal endeavour at ‘home’, such groups are not noted as sources of novel and helpful ideas and practices. Beyond the ‘traditional’ leaders of community development, it is individuals and organisations based in the ancestral homeland and its ‘internal diaspora’ within Nigeria that are identified as the key sources of innovation.

And while there are diaspora organisations that take the form of issue-based NGOs and have explicit objectives to disseminate at 'home' new and developmentally-beneficial information, ideas and behaviours, their 'social remittances' are rarely as novel as celebratory discourses of diaspora and development might expect. Indeed, it is NGOs based at 'home' that appear to lead the way in spreading such knowledge and practices. Similarly, despite the great progressive promise attached to diasporic professional associations in both national and globalising discourses of diaspora and development, there is a strong sense that the 'social remittances' offered by these groups are also not as innovative and useful as might be expected. Furthermore, it is also clear that in lauding the ideas and expertise of diasporans and their organisations, there is a danger of generating resentment among highly skilled and experienced individuals and groups at 'home', severely damaging the nascent transnational co-operations upon which any possibility of productive border-spanning knowledge exchange depends. Again, it would appear that it is necessary for globalising discourses of diaspora and development to afford much greater recognition to local capabilities if ways are to be identified in which diasporic contributions can complement and support ongoing processes of development at 'home'.

### **'Enlightening' the community? Collective social remittances at the local level**

London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations grounded in communal identities, such as 'hometown associations' and 'ethnic unions', tend not to cite the transnational transmission of ideas and behaviours as a primary transnational objective. While often contending that they have been 'exposed' to, and do attempt to transfer 'home', new and/or possibly useful notions and practices, members of geo-ethnic diaspora organisations overwhelmingly give much greater emphasis to the channelling of money and materials and the assertion of 'homeland' interest when detailing their collective border-spanning desires and efforts. Indeed, of the 32 geo-ethnic organisations engaged in this study, only two, MOSOP Europe and the Ibenudu Development Union (IDU), indicate that they have undertaken or supported an explicit project that could be described as a conscious collective attempt to transmit to the ancestral community some form of 'social remittance'.

In both instances, the projects took the form of HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns. In the case of MOSOP Europe, the programme was initiated by the 'parent' branch based in

Port Harcourt and is funded principally by a Holland-based international NGO from which the late Ken Saro-Wiwa had originally garnered support in the early 1990s. While the HIV/AIDS awareness campaign supported by the IDU in Ibenudu was conceived by the organisation itself and undertaken by a couple of its members during a visit to the ancestral homeland in 2003, a member laments that it had a rather fleeting impact with evidence of the leaflets, posters, and banners that were distributed around the community having disappeared by the time he visited 'home' later that year. There is little indication, then, that geo-ethnic diaspora organisations have been effective instigators of programmatic attempts to transfer 'home' useful ideas and behaviours.

Members of such organisations sometimes suggest, however, that they do make attempts as individuals to transfer 'home' some of the novel and potentially helpful ideas and ways of doing things to which they often believe they have been 'exposed' in diaspora. For example, Chief Olajide of the Ayege National Progress Union (ANPU), London contends that "political minded" members seek to employ their personal contacts to remit diasporic 'enlightenment' to state officials at 'home', such as the local government chairman:

[...T]he chairman there, we know him, we try to educate him, advise him how to go about things the way we do here, [...], we pass it on to him, and see the best way to help the people. [...S]o what will be of use for us back home, we pick it from here and then pass it on [...], like primary health, I mean you have access to free healthcare at least, [...]. (Interview, London, April 2006)

However, even Chief Olajide is rather sceptical about the tangible difference that such attempted 'social remittances' make in practice, bemoaning, "there's nothing much you can do from here to influence them, we can only advise". Indeed, no ANPU London members could identify an instance where they felt they had communicated an idea to an official in a way that produced a discernable change in state policy or practice. Concordantly, the Chairman of Ayege/Asiki Local Government gave no indication that he had embraced any visions from the diaspora and its organisations. Indeed, he saw associations of overseas Omoyeges not as a source of ideas and advice but simply as potential financial donors to local government projects and as institutions for 'preserving' Omoyege culture 'abroad'. Furthermore, the Chairman made it clear that the programmes that ANPU London members had suggested to me as the kind they wanted the local government to 'adopt', such as the creation of more reliable water and

electricity supplies, had long been demanded by the local community itself and had been actively pursued by his administration since it took office in 2003. Moreover, as a well-travelled, professionally-trained engineer, the Chairman displayed confidence that he was himself suitably equipped with the knowledge and expertise to preside over the effective execution of such ideas.

In Levitt's (1998) original conception of 'social remittances', overseas 'hometown associations' are identified as being especially effective at transmitting progressive ideas and practices, such as financial management skills, to 'home'-based community development committees. However, the Ayege Progress Committee (APC), the 'home'-based 'parent' body of ANPU London, appears to have embraced very little 'exposure' from its overseas branches. Indeed, members of ANPU London often appear to be resigned to the apparent futility of attempting to 'enlighten' their 'parent' body at 'home'. This was exemplified in early 2006 when discussion at one of ANPU London's monthly meetings turned to a letter recently received from the Oba and APC requesting financial support for the community's latest headline project, the establishment of a tertiary institution in Ayege. One of the assembled members expressed frustration that the 'traditional authorities' had again provided neither a "formal proposal" nor a "budget" for one of their projects and suggested that the Union should be "cautious" about sending any money until it had received "proper documentation". With an impatience that suggested certain realities had to be accepted, another member countered, "We only think in terms of documenting things properly because we are here. We are far ahead of them in terms of properly documenting things. They just don't think like that no matter how educated they are". If potential donors delayed their largesse until seeing "proper documentation", he continued, there was a danger that government officials would arrive in the town to accredit the polytechnic only to "find nothing there". Having considered the two perspectives, the Union agreed that while an attempt would again be made to restate their desire to see "proper documentation" for future APC projects, they would, as ever, press ahead with raising and sending a collective contribution despite not having been presented with a "written plan". It was quite clear that the Union held little hope of success in its latest attempt to modify the thinking and behaviour of its 'parent'-body. As one member laments, "the APC back home, they run the place, they have their own way of doing things" (Interview, London, July 2005).

*'Enlightening' the community: the importance of local agency and the 'internal diaspora'*

As the frustration of some ANPU London members suggests, the 'traditional authorities' tend to see themselves as the primary architects and most effective executors of communal 'self-help' endeavours and do not give the impression that they consider ANPU London or any other overseas Omoyege organisations as a valuable source of new and developmentally beneficial ideas and behaviours. Members of the Oba-in-Council and its "executive arm", the APC, many of whom have themselves had distinguished academic and professional careers 'abroad', are confident that their own 'exposure' coupled to their intimacy with the needs and aspirations of the local community suitably equips them to formulate and enact initiatives in ways that best serve the interests of the kingdom. Within the division of organisational labour that the 'traditional authorities' imagine and seek to preside over, Omoyege associations, both at 'home' and 'abroad', are tasked primarily with providing financial and material support rather than innovative ideas and practices.

Furthermore, in the few instances where members of the 'traditional authorities' do credit an Omoyege association with introducing a new and useful idea or practice, the credited organisation is identified as being located in the Omoyege diaspora within Nigeria or in Ayege itself rather than overseas. For example, in the case of what the 'traditional authorities' note as the most significant new idea they have adopted at the suggestion of an Omoyege organisation, credit for its introduction is ascribed to a 'social club' based within the kingdom. As the Oba recalls:

[...T]he first Ayege Day was celebrated in 1989. There is a club in the town, Winners Club, they initiated it. They consulted the high chiefs then, I was a high chief then, and the high chiefs bought the idea and asked this club to start planning for it. And then it was successful [...]. And ever since, we have been observing Ayege Day each November<sup>1</sup>. (Interview, Ayege, December 2005)

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<sup>1</sup> The Oba went on to explain that the Winners Club had come up with the idea of Ayege Day because its members had seen and heard that "other communities all around [...] devote a day to raise funds for the development of their area". Indeed, Ayege's neighbouring kingdoms all hold their own respective 'community days'. Furthermore, the literature on 'ethnic unions' and 'hometown associations' suggests that the holding of 'community days' has become a widespread practice across Nigeria, especially in the southern half of the Federation (see for example Honey and Okafor 1998 and Trager 2001).

More recently, the 'traditional authorities' have welcomed what they consider to be another novel and highly significant idea advanced by an Omoyege organisation based within Nigeria. Founded in 2001 and bringing together prominent, 'middle-aged' professionals from the major nodes of the extended Omoyege community within Nigeria, the Lagos-based Ayege Economic Forum (AEF) is credited with introducing to Omoyege communal endeavour an innovative notion of 'economic development'. For Mr Adesanya, the Forum's founder and Chairman and the head of one of Nigeria's largest commercial enterprises, Ayege's 'apex' organisation, the APC, remains "very traditional" in its approach, focussing on "cultural governance" and the construction of grand communal edifices (Interview, Lagos, December 2005). In contrast, the AEF espouses an explicit discourse of "economic empowerment", seeking to "create economic space for the average Ayege indigene" by establishing "engines of growth" in the kingdom, providing "training and skills" and ultimately generating "employment and jobs" (ibid). Embracing the AEF and its new way of conceiving and realising Omoyege progress, the 'traditional authorities' have supported its purchase from the state government of the only major industrial facility in the kingdom, overseen the management of a significant micro-credit fund it has deposited at the Ayege Community Bank and hosted its agricultural and micro-enterprise training programmes in the town hall.

In addition to lauding the innovative ideas and practices that the Lagos-based AEF has introduced to the project of Omoyege development, the 'traditional authorities' also highlight how other organisations in the extended Omoyege community within Nigeria have been of great assistance in their efforts to 'enlighten' and 're-orientate' the local citizenry of Ayege. Omoyege 'social clubs' and 'student' and 'youth' associations based in the kingdom and its diaspora within Nigeria are well known for organising free tutorial classes, lectures, essay writing competitions, and quizzes for local secondary school students. Founded in 1981 and with its headquarters in the kingdom and branches at universities across Nigeria, the National Union of Ayege Students is also noted for organising HIV/AIDS awareness seminars in Ayege in recent years. Furthermore, prominent 'youth' organisations based in the kingdom are widely recognised for their efforts to bring political 'enlightenment' to Ayege. For example, the Ayege Youth Movement implores the community to "shun" the "politics of money and material gains" and to expect political office holders "to give account of their



stewardship” by meeting regularly with “traditional rulers” and the “electorate” (APC document 2001).

Clearly, when the ‘traditional authorities’ and ordinary citizens of Ayege identify the sources of the most innovative and important ideas and practices to have been introduced to the project of communal progress, they point to Omoyege associations based in the kingdom and its diaspora within Nigeria rather than those based overseas. In Ukenwa too, geo-ethnic associations based overseas appear to have a limited role as a source of new and developmentally beneficial knowledge and behaviours. Certainly, Ukenwans in London and Ukenwa did not identify any instances of an overseas Ukenwa association making an organised attempt to transfer ‘home’ some kind of ‘social remittance’. A couple of the local ‘patrons’ of the Ukenwa Women’s Association UK (OWA) argue that members of the organisation do “enlighten the society” through their personal interaction and communication with friends and family at ‘home’, particularly in terms of promoting “etiquette”, including practices of punctuality, queuing, and speaking quietly in public (Interview, Ukenwa, October 2005). However, it was made clear that members of the OWA do not have a monopoly on acquiring and transferring such ‘exposure’. The acquisition of these forms of ‘enlightenment’ by OWA members was traced not to their membership of the OWA or, indeed, their being in diaspora, but rather to their pre-migration ‘exposure’ to ‘Western’ education and Christianity in Ukenwa itself. Sharing this ‘home’-based ‘exposure’ with OWA members, the two local OWA ‘patrons’, like other elite women in Ukenwa, assert that they already possess and extol the same ideas, values, and behaviours as their diasporic counterparts. Indeed, for these elite women of the city, who also tend to point-out that they are themselves regular travellers beyond the borders of Nigeria, members of the OWA are not so much a source of new ideas, values, and behaviours but simply like-minded allies in the quest to ‘enlighten’ less ‘exposed’ members of the community.

### **Promoting ‘healthy living’ and ‘community development’: diaspora NGOs and the successes and limits of collective social remittance strategies**

Unlike geo-ethnic diaspora associations, diaspora NGOs often focus explicitly on transferring ‘home’ what might be described as ‘social remittances’. For example, with its space of transnational intervention defined as the city of Calabar and Cross River State as a whole, the London-based Dr Bassey Kubianga Education Trust describes its

aim as “empowering health workers to educate the local community and fight against ignorance and superstition” (BK Trust document, n.d.). In short, the BK Trust, as it is commonly known by its members, is “committed to promoting health education in Cross River State” (ibid). Mrs Magdalene Kubianga, the Trust’s founder, argues that its focus on “informing the local community [...] of the importance of healthcare and disease prevention” honours and continues the work of her late husband, a London-based Calabarian medical doctor in whose memory the organisation was founded in early 2004 (Interview, London, June 2006). However, the focus of the Trust also reflects Mrs Kubianga’s desire to employ in the service of ‘home’ her own professional skills and expertise acquired through her largely UK-based training and career in dental and general health promotion:

[...W]hen I came over here, I did dental health education and went to university and studied health issues and all that and then I’m into health promotion. So back home, there isn’t much health promotion being practiced and therefore my aspiration is to set up the health promotion group and say, “look, this is the way we do things in Britain”.

Local actors who have been consulted and engaged in the planning and establishment of the BK Trust and its programmes in Cross River State voice strong enthusiasm for this vision, arguing that it does indeed have the potential to introduce new and developmentally beneficial ideas, knowledge, expertise and practices. Contending that the organisation “promises to be useful” and that “members of the community welcome it”, a noted local medical practitioner explains:

[...] it will be a very positive thing because the idea of health promotion is novel, is new in our community, even among professionals it is very new. It is an area of emphasis globally, globally there is a new focus, it’s a strategy for the prevention of disease and control of disease. If we can promote health, positive thinking about health, then disease will be brought down, so we do hope that in a little way, [the BK Trust] will make it. (Interview, Calabar, October 2005)

Furthermore, for Dr Joseph Ana, the Cross River State Commissioner of Health, the introduction of “health promotion” is central to improving the uptake and effectiveness of the healthcare system over which he presides (Interview, Calabar, October 2005). Indeed, he identifies it as one of the key policy initiatives he has sought to implement since assuming office in 2004, having returned to Calabar armed with the innovative

ideas he believes he has gleaned from his career of over 20 years as a surgeon and general practitioner in the UK. Arguing that “government would never be able to do it all”, Dr Ana believes that the BK Trust can be “very helpful in putting the searchlight on public health promotion”.

Having taken occupancy of an office complex owned by the Kubianga family, in April 2005 the Trust held a ‘Health Day’ to mark its formal launch in Calabar. At his inaugural event, Mrs Kubianga and her fellow UK trustees came together with local health professionals to present talks and information stalls on issues such as cardiovascular disease, HIV/AIDS, nutrition, diabetes, oral health, infection, special needs, sexually transmitted diseases, and women’s and men’s health. On the 24<sup>th</sup> August that year, the BK Trust opened its Health Promotion Resource Centre, which was stocked with the late Dr Kubianga’s medical books and journals and further publications donated by his UK-based friends and colleagues. Holding some 1,000 medical and health-related volumes, the Centre had received 244 visits from between 50 to 60 different users by 10 October 2005. In late September 2005, the Trust commenced its first major “enlightenment programme”<sup>2</sup>, the Inter-School Health Debate in which teams from twelve secondary schools in and around Calabar were paired off to debate a health-related issue in a series of knock-out rounds held over a period of eight weeks. The debated issues were taken to a state-wide audience by the Cross River Broadcasting Corporation, which featured each round in its evening television news programme.

During a visit to Calabar in June 2006, Mrs Kubianga launched a “disability unit” within the Trust, focussing initially on Braille and computer skills acquisition for the “visually impaired” (Interview, London, June 2006). On the same visit, Mrs Kubianga and a British colleague also brought together some 30 health workers from local governments across the state for a training session in how to plan, implement, and evaluate health promotion programmes. This marked the inauguration of the Cross River State Health Promotion Group, a collaborative initiative between the BK Trust and the Cross River Ministry of Health that seeks to provide a sustained programme of training and information support to health promotion facilitators at the local community level.

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<sup>2</sup> BK Trust trustee, interview, Calabar, November 2005.

Established by a group of six church friends in 1999, the London-based diaspora NGO Development Impact for Nigeria (DIFN) has an even more established record of attempting to disseminate ‘enlightenment’ at ‘home’. Working principally in Ipaja, Lagos, DIFN seeks to “challenge, encourage, and support” schools, local government, NGOs, CBOs, ‘youth’, journalists and, in particular, churches to be more actively and effectively engaged in “community development”, especially in terms of promoting “life skills”, “healthy living”, and “HIV/AIDS awareness, care, and support” (DIFN trustee, interview, July 2005). The “job” that DIFN has taken upon itself is, therefore, principally “one of education”, attempting to “re-orientate”, “train”, and “build the capacity” of local actors to adopt and pursue ideas of “community development”, “social justice”, and “poverty alleviation” in a society deemed to have become “too individualistic”, “divided”, and “impoverished” after 16 years of military rule (DIFN trustee, interview, July 2006). To this end, DIFN has organised in Nigeria between October 1999 and August 2005 twenty-five “awareness” and “training” workshops and programmes, cumulatively attracting over 900 participants (DIFN documents). In so doing, DIFN has indeed begun to be seen within its space of intervention as a source of ‘enlightenment’.

Through participation in DIFN workshops, Pastor Oluwafemi Martins and other church leaders argue that they have come to embrace DIFN’s message that churches should aspire to provide their community not only with “spiritual food” but also “practical help” (Interview, Ipaja, August 2005). Indeed, Pastor Martins contends that he has himself directly responded to the vision of DIFN, making a “radical change” to his own sermons so that they “face the immediate needs of the people”. Furthermore, Pastor Martins, like other workshop participants, has come to embrace DIFN’s contention that the church should play an active role in countering the spread of HIV/AIDS, learning from the diaspora organisation what it considers to be the best way of doing so:

At that seminar, I realised that it’s not only what the scripture says but what is the reality on the ground [...]. The reality on the ground is that people are not really living according to the scriptures and so [...] there’s no way you can use the scriptures to handle their issues anymore. [...] Total abstinence is what the scriptures preach but our society has become as promiscuous as it is, so they recommended some of the medical safeguards like the use of condoms [...].

Along with other participants, Pastor Martins has also heeded DIFN's message on how the church should change its attitude to people living with HIV/AIDS:

Before it has been a situation of ostracising them, you treat them as if they should be in the lepers home, but from DIFN and some of the other organisations, I think people are becoming sensitised to realise that it is not a crime to have HIV and that those who have the condition need more of our love than our ostracising them...

Beyond church leaders such as Pastor Martins, members of other groups targeted by DIFN also enthusiastically celebrate this diaspora organisation as a source of 'enlightenment'. Retired nurses who operate the Ipaja Community Health Project, a local NGO, credit DIFN workshops with refreshing and updating their community health skills. Teachers who have been trained by DIFN to operate Child-to-Child Health Clubs in four local schools argue that participating pupils have imbibed, and shared with their peers and families, knowledge about personal hygiene, sanitation, healthy diet, oral health, malaria and diarrhoea prevention and making health products such as soap and mosquito repellent. Participants in DIFN's annual week-long 'youth' training contend, along with their parents and teachers, that the programme has improved their "discipline" and "confidence" and heightened their "life and leadership skills", such as those of "study", "decision making", "independent living", "interaction", "communication", and "time-management" (Interviews, Ipaja, August 2005). This programme, which in 2004 and 2005 took the form of a residential camp, is also seen to have taught participants from various age groups useful knowledges, particularly in relation to HIV/AIDS, the Child-to-Child Approach to health and development promotion, and the dangers of alcohol, drugs, and 'cultism'.

***Complementing processes of 'enlightenment' at 'home': contextualising the collective social remittances of diaspora NGOs***

Undoubtedly, DIFN and the BK Trust are widely seen by those they have engaged at 'home' as agents of 'enlightenment'. However, while the ideas, knowledge, practices and behaviours these diaspora NGOs seek to disseminate at 'home' are often deemed to be 'enlightening', they are by no means entirely a product of access to diasporic 'exposure' and neither are they entirely new, innovative, or radical in the local and national contexts. For example, for Mr Bode Omokaro, DIFN's Ipaja-based Nigeria Programme Coordinator, the organisation's central contention, that individuals and

institutions should be actively involved in ‘community development’, is hardly radical. While he certainly agrees that this idea is not held widely enough in Nigeria, it is one he has himself embraced passionately since long before he ever came into contact with DIFN. Indeed, Bode argues that, by virtue of having joined the Scouts and the Red Cross while at secondary school in Lagos, he has been invested with the principle of “service to humanity” ever since childhood (Interview, Ipaja, December 2005). Furthermore, he has continued his commitment to this principle throughout his adult life prior to meeting DIFN, not only remaining very active in the Red Cross but also attaining a postgraduate diploma in community development from the prestigious University of Ibadan and working as a district coordinator in national immunisation exercises.

Moreover, it was also without any contact with DIFN that Bode volunteered his considerable experience in the field to involve his church in community development, becoming a prime mover in encouraging and enabling it to establish the Ipaja Community Health Project in 1994. Consequently, when, some five years later, Mr Yomi Oloko, the London-based founder of DIFN, travelled to Lagos to run the organisation’s first ever training workshop and met Bode among the participants, he found someone at ‘home’ who already shared both his passion for ‘community development’ and his conviction that institutions such as the church should be more engaged in the process. It was through a meeting of minds, then, rather than any moment of diaspora-induced ‘enlightenment’, that Bode was asked to join DIFN to coordinate its activities in Nigeria.

With Bode having agreed to work with DIFN, first as a part-time volunteer and, by 2002, as its first full-time, paid member of staff, the organisation has relied heavily on his own knowledge and expertise along with that of other local actors. This is not to say that diasporic flows of ideas and information have been unimportant. During visits ‘home’, Yomi tries to attend, and share his ‘exposure’ at, a couple of DIFN programmes each year. He has also recently sourced what Bode considers to be very useful HIV/AIDS resource material from two UK-based international NGOs. Furthermore, it was Yomi who found on the Internet the Child-to-Child Approach to health and development promotion and suggested to Bode that he should attempt to introduce this programme, developed by international experts coordinated by the University of London, to schools in Ipaja. However, as DIFN’s UK trustees acknowledge, the credit

for a number of original ideas, such as the annual youth camp, and the responsibility for the precise formulation and ultimate execution of interventions lie overwhelmingly with Bode.

Moreover, in designing and actualising DIFN programmes, Bode complements his own initiative and experience not only by drawing on ideas and resource materials remitted by Yomi in London but also by sourcing information, knowledge, and expertise from other local actors in Nigeria. When Yomi suggested adopting the Child-to-Child Approach, for example, Bode identified, and received specialised training and support from, a Kaduna-based NGO that had an established record of working with the programme. More generally, Bode has routinely sought the advice of colleagues in the Red Cross and friends in his church who have professional experience of community health and development programmes. Bode especially values the guidance of Reverend Major (Mrs) Bunmi Idowu-Okusanya, a close friend and neighbour who, after retiring as a Nigerian army medical officer in 1991, established, and continues to run, an NGO for the care of the local elderly in Ipaja.

Furthermore, Bode has been able to bring additional local expertise directly into DIFN. In late 2004, thanks to a two-year grant of £2,000 per annum from Christian Aid in the UK, Bode recruited Ms Mercy Egbejule and Mr Jonathan Maxwell-Gii as full-time programme officers, each of whom has several years experience of working in HIV/AIDS awareness, care, and support with local NGOs. The knowledge, expertise, and connections of Mercy and Jonathan have not only enabled the formulation and initial development of new programmes, such as HIV/AIDS counselling and support groups, but have also buttressed Bode's efforts to gain the assistance of other local organisations working on issues of community health and HIV/AIDS.

Indeed, the networking efforts of the team in Lagos mean that DIFN seminars and workshops have often been supported with resource materials and/or persons from a variety of local organisations. The organisations that have provided such support to DIFN include the Lagos State Government, particularly its AIDS Control Agency (LSACA), and the Nigerian branches of two international NGOs, Hope Worldwide and Family Health International. However, DIFN has received most of its local information

and human resource support from five “indigenous”<sup>3</sup> Nigerian NGOs, namely the Youth Empowerment Foundation, Journalists Against AIDS, the Society for Family Health (SFH), Human Development Initiatives (HDI) and the Redeemed AIDS Programme Action Committee (RAPAC).

Together with Bode, his staff, and a number of his contacts, friends, and neighbours, well-respected ‘indigenous’ NGOs such as SFH, HDI, and RAPAC highlight the existence of a vibrant and sometimes highly effective local ‘civil society’ sector. The existence of this ‘home’-based ‘civil society’ in turn highlights the limits to which diaspora NGOs such as the BK Trust and DIFN can be seen to be ‘introducing’ at ‘home’ novel ideas of ‘community development’ and ‘health promotion’ and innovative ways in which they can be pursued. For example, Lagos-based Human Development Initiatives (HDI) was founded some three years before DIFN and can be seen to have anticipated the diaspora organisation’s vision by aiming to “build human capacity” and “promote human development ideals”<sup>4</sup>. Indeed, HDI espouses very similar principles to DIFN, including “equality”, “justice”, and “solidarity”, and runs analogous programmes including “community development” promotion, HIV/AIDS awareness, “life skills” training, school health clubs, and an annual youth camp<sup>5</sup>.

DIFN cannot even claim an innovation in placing particular emphasis on targeting the church in the promotion of ‘community development’ – HDI and other ‘indigenous’ Nigeria-based NGOs also see the church, as well as the mosque and faith based organisations (FBOs) in general, as key partners in community health and development<sup>6</sup>. Many churches, mosques, and FBOs even run well-established ‘community development’ programmes and NGOs of their own, some of which, such as the Catholic Church’s Justice, Development, and Peace Commission, have attained national and international recognition. Indeed, most of the churches that DIFN has engaged in and around Lagos were already actively addressing, or at least looking to address, issues of community development and HIV/AIDS prior to meeting, and receiving training from, the diaspora organisation. Even in the realm of the supposedly “negligent”<sup>7</sup> church, therefore, the idea of ‘introducing’ and promoting the notion and

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.sfhigeria.org/About%20SFH.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.hdinigeria.org/about.php>

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*, <http://www.hdinigeria.org/mission.php> and <http://www.hdinigeria.org/achievements.php>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.hdinigeria.org/partners.php>, <http://www.sfhigeria.org/About%20SFH.html>

<sup>7</sup> DIFN trustee, interview, London, July 2006.



practice of 'community development' may not be quite as innovative as DIFN's UK-based trustees sometimes appear to suggest.

Furthermore, 'indigenous' Nigeria-based NGOs and FBOs are not only already working with the vision of 'community development' that DIFN seeks to 'introduce' but could also be seen to be more effective at disseminating and instilling it in practice. For example, with a team of 15 highly experienced trustees and staff and a much more extensive network of partnerships with local, national, and international state and civil society agencies and donors, Lagos-based Human Development Initiatives boasts an inventory of interventions considerably longer and more extensive than that of DIFN<sup>8</sup>. DIFN would appear to have even further to go before it could claim to match the 'enlightening' efforts of another of the 'indigenous' Nigeria-based NGOs from which it has received information and human resource support. Founded in 1983 and with 15 regional offices, a staff of over 230 and major grants from international donors, the Abuja-based Society for Family Health claims to have "reached out to tens of millions of Nigerians" in its mission "to motivate the adoption of healthy behaviours"<sup>9</sup>. Indeed, in the area of HIV/AIDS alone, SFH claims that it has, among numerous other interventions, introduced a peer education programme to 112 communities across the country and engaged 35% of the national population aged between 15 and 29 with one of its radio dramas<sup>10</sup>.

Despite having access to the supposed wealth of diasporic resources and 'exposure', DIFN's programme of 'enlightenment' is, therefore, neither entirely innovative nor anywhere near the most extensive of those undertaken by the more than 450 'civil society organisations' officially registered as working on the issue of HIV/AIDS in Lagos State (Lagos State AIDS Control Agency official, interview, Lagos, September 2005; Lagos State NGOs Summit on HIV/AIDS, Lagos, 15<sup>th</sup> September 2005). Like many who have come into contact with DIFN and deemed its work to be beneficial, Pastor Martins is well aware that there are "hundreds" of other NGOs based in Lagos and across Nigeria working on issues of community health and development, especially

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.hdinigeria.org/administration.php>, <http://www.hdinigeria.org/staff.php>,  
<http://www.hdinigeria.org/partners.php>, <http://www.hdinigeria.org/achievements.php>,  
<http://www.hdinigeria.org/services.php>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.sfhigeria.org/About%20SFH.html>,  
<http://www.sfhigeria.org/Donors%20and%20Partners.html>, <http://www.sfhigeria.org/Mission.html>

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.psi.org/where\\_we\\_work/nigeria.html#](http://www.psi.org/where_we_work/nigeria.html#)

in relation to HIV/AIDS. Consequently, he is not alone in being able to put DIFN and its work in context, echoing the sentiments of others in arguing:

[...] it's a small organisation [...] and yet it's making impact in its own little way [...]. [...] I think DIFN needs to expand beyond the scope of just handling few individuals here and there [...], they need to have a national network [...]. [...] it's one thing to start it small, but I don't think it's the best to keep it small, I believe there is the need for growth [...]. (Interview, Ipaja, August 2005)

While endorsing DIFN's vision and work as useful and 'enlightening' if not entirely innovative, such sentiments mirror the frustration of some of the organisation's Nigeria-based staff and UK-based trustees that they have been unable to reach as many people and communities within and beyond Ipaja as they would have hoped. This frustration is all the more intense for DIFN's local staff as they appear to be much more conscious than their diasporic trustees of the limited scale of the organisation's 'enlightenment' programmes relative to those operated by the "big NGOs"<sup>11</sup> based in Nigeria.

Given that 'indigenous' NGOs have proliferated and attained some considerable strength not only in Lagos but across the nation over the last twenty years, the work of the BK Trust in Calabar must also be seen in the context of a vibrant and sometimes highly-effective local 'civil society' sector. While the BK Trust may well be an innovator in Cross River State in initiating a highly focussed and integrated vision of 'health promotion', it is far from the only, and certainly not yet anywhere near the most powerful, NGO in the area seeking to promote notions and practices of good health. Like Lagos, Calabar has spawned a plethora of local NGOs concerned with health, some of which have more developed programmes than the BK Trust and a stronger presence to the north of the state beyond the metropolis. Furthermore, Calabar also plays host to the regional offices and extensive health programmes established by some of the major national NGOs noted above, such as the Society for Family Health, the Redeemed AIDS Programme Action Committee, and the Justice, Development and Peace Commission.

Despite having access to the supposed wealth of diasporic resources and 'exposure' and although warmly welcomed as useful and developmentally beneficial, the programmes of 'enlightenment' undertaken by DIFN and the BK Trust are neither entirely innovative

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<sup>11</sup> DIFN staff, interviews, Ipaja, August and September 2005.

nor anywhere near the most powerful of those operating in their local and national spaces of intervention. Local NGOs have often anticipated the visions of these diaspora organisations and are readily identified as much more important agents of such ‘enlightenment’. Despite being two of the most successful London-based diaspora organisations identified, DIFN and the BK Trust are, therefore, simply making modest contributions to, rather than driving, the spread of ‘new’ ideas and ‘good’ behaviours at ‘home’.

**“The Nigerian renaissance will be driven by the repatriation of ideas”<sup>12</sup>: national development and the promise, politics and limits of diasporic expertise**

As President Obasanjo made clear in his ground-breaking speech at the ‘First Presidential Diaspora Dialogue’ in Atlanta in September 2000, it was the promise of what might be termed ‘social remittances’ that encouraged him to initiate a transnational relationship through which diasporic professionals and their organisations could participate in the development of the ‘home’-nation (Obasanjo 2000). Reasserting this contention at Nigeria’s first diaspora engagement conference, held in Abuja in July 2005, President Obasanjo advocated the “build[ing of] strong bridges of contact and exchange” with “Nigerian professionals in diaspora”, arguing:

There is a huge pool of skills and expertise in diaspora. If we adequately tap it, it will make a significant contribution to national development. [...] Those that have gone abroad have acquired new knowledge and expertise that will help us manage our affairs along the lines of global practice.

Indeed, like the diaspora engagement agencies established by the Federal Government at ‘home’ (NNVS) and ‘abroad’ (NIDO), this pioneering conference, entitled ‘Bridging the digital and scientific divides’, was established with a primary objective to “encourage the repatriation to Nigeria of scientific knowledge, skills, and expertise from Nigerians in the diaspora” (NNVS document, 2005).

While its development remains embryonic and its future uncertain, the Nigerian state’s transnational engagement with diasporic professionals and their organisations has indeed enabled the emergence of networks for the transmission of such ‘social

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<sup>12</sup> Professor Pat Utomi, presentation at the ‘Bridging the digital and scientific divides: forging partnerships with the Nigerian diaspora’ conference, Abuja, 25<sup>th</sup> July 2005.

remittances'. Held in July 2005, the Federal Government's pioneering diaspora engagement conference facilitated the development of interpersonal transnational contacts and exchanges in the fields of science, technology, health and education by bringing 70 diasporans, including 10 from the UK, together with over 350 of their 'home'-based professional counterparts. Some institutionalised channels for the 'transfer' of ideas, knowledge, and expertise were also initiated through the conference. It was resolved that the conference itself would be held annually and a project was launched to create an internet-based system for Nigerian 'experts' abroad to provide 'distance mentoring' to university science students at 'home'. Furthermore, the conference was utilised by the National Universities Commission to promote its Linkage with Experts and Academics in the Diaspora (LEAD) scheme<sup>13</sup>. Originally launched in November 2004, the LEAD initiative aims to encourage suitably qualified and experienced diasporans to assume short-term academic appointments of between one and twelve months in the Nigerian university system. In the words of the programme's director, the hope is that participants, of which there had been two by the end of 2005, will "bring back fresh ideas [...] based on [their] exposure over there" (Interview, Abuja, August 2005).

In their attempts to open-up transnational channels for the transfer 'home' of diasporic expertise, the Nigerian state's diaspora engagement conferences have made associations of diasporic professionals a key target. For example, after some two years of discussion, a 'Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the Health Sector' was finally signed at the 2006 conference between the Federal Ministry of Health and the respective associations of Nigerian medical professionals based in the UK and the Americas. In addition to promising to support these two diaspora organisations in their efforts to provide books, equipment, and direct medical services at 'home', the memorandum is centrally concerned with facilitating these groups' attempts to transfer diasporic 'intellectual capacity' to the health sector in Nigeria.

Inspired by the established transnational practice of these targeted associations of UK and Americas-based Nigerian health professionals, the memorandum posits the 'medical mission' as a primary channel for both material and intellectual remittances. Indeed, this mode of collective diasporic intervention has some standing as effective means of

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<sup>13</sup> At launch, this programme was known as the Nigerian Experts and Academics in the Diaspora Scheme (NEADS). This title was changed to its present form in June 2007 to avoid confusion with the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS).

transferring ‘home’ ‘new’ knowledge and practice. For example, having received and overseen two medical missions in recent years, the first from the US in November 2004 and the second from the UK in June 2005, a senior medical official in the Lagos State Ministry of Health argues that through their coordinated focus on cardiovascular surgery and by providing “much” essential equipment while employing their “higher level” expertise alongside local medics, these missions provided “training on the job” (Interview, Lagos, October 2005). Indeed, the official contends that the participating local practitioners had not before undertaken the particular surgical procedure demonstrated by the diasporic medics on these missions, adding, “now that they’re learning from them we are confident they can handle it later”.

However, there is also considerable doubt among medical practitioners based both at ‘home’ and ‘abroad’ about the need for, and current effectiveness of, the ‘medical mission’ as a channel for the transfer ‘home’ of new knowledge and skills. This was particularly evident at the ‘Health, Basic and Applied Sciences’ ‘break-out session’ at the 2005 diaspora engagement conference, during which the value of ‘medical missions’ as a means of ‘enlightenment’ was a key topic of discussion among the 30 or so Nigerian health professionals gathered from within and without the Federation. In response to presentations by the Federal Minister of Health and executives of the respective associations of Nigerian medics in the UK and the Americas, all of which devoted much attention to this mode of transnational intervention, a senior professor from a Lagos-based medical school argued that the ‘medical missions’ her institution had received from a US-based team of diasporic medics “just focussed on treating patients and didn’t think about training the trainers”.

In a similar vein, a doctor from one of Nigeria’s most esteemed medical schools contended that ‘medical missions’ “have no long-term benefit”, bemoaning that some members of a diasporic mission to his institution did not even speak to him and his colleagues. Moreover, addressing the diasporans in attendance and generating exclamations of concurrence from an audience predominantly made up of his fellow locally-based medics, he argued, “most of the surgery that you do on medical missions, we can do”. “Medical missions are good, they are humanitarian”, he continued, “but we have the skills too”. Indeed, echoing other local practitioners who addressed the session or participated in my research, this doctor asserted that the fundamental challenge facing healthcare practitioners in Nigeria is not a lack of medical expertise but rather a

paralysing dearth of equipment, facilities, and infrastructure. “We are working under difficult conditions”, he insisted, pointing out that it is often necessary to cancel operations because of power cuts. Some diasporic medics, he suggested, “couldn’t work under the conditions we work under here”.

Indeed, to further cries of agreement from fellow participants, he stated that it was often the case that the only reason ‘medical missions’ could overcome the challenge of local conditions and utilise skills was that they tend to be “taken-over” by the receiving state government “for political gain”. Exemplifying this, he claimed that in facilitating and seeking to gain credit for the mission that visited his medical school, the state government made a special effort to ensure that, for the duration of the intervention, the institution was “scrubbed”, stocked with essential medical equipment and drugs and able to operate its generators constantly. Consequently, while this doctor acknowledged that ‘medical missions’ could lead to politically motivated, short-term improvements in the physical capacity of medical institutions, he contended that in terms of knowledge, skills and expertise, “we don’t need them”. If diasporic medics wanted to do something genuinely useful for their local counterparts, he concluded to loud applause, they should take advantage of their new-found access to the President “to tell him he needs to improve facilities”.

Significantly, many of the diasporic medics present at the session were more than sympathetic to such arguments, expressing as much doubt as their ‘home’-based colleagues about the need for, and efficacy of, ‘medical missions’ as a means of transnational ‘enlightenment’. A UK-based consultant asserted that ‘medical missions’ tend to be conducted on a “one-off” basis and constitute “wasted effort”, having little long-term impact once the stock of drugs they usually supply is exhausted. Similarly, a US-based doctor contended that diasporic medics and their associations “shouldn’t be talking about” providing direct medical treatment through “temporary medical missions” but should instead focus on developing “the wider infrastructure”, for example, by supporting businesses that can maintain medical equipment. Indeed, both of these diasporans agreed with a counterpart based in Singapore who argued, in concordance with many of the local practitioners present, that the Nigerian healthcare system faced “no dearth of brains, but a dearth of infrastructure and political vision”.

Furthermore, even representatives of the respective associations of Nigerian medics in the UK and the Americas, through which many diasporic ‘medical missions’ are organised, accredited and/or sponsored, also expressed notable doubts about the efficacy of this mode of transnational intervention as a channel for knowledge and skills transfer. Addressing the session, an executive of the Association of Nigerian Physicians in the Americas (ANPA) was rather modest about the long-term, structural benefits of the 30 missions it had carried out during its ten years of existence, conceding that they “represent a drop in the bucket and a miniscule improvement in the overall decay in our healthcare system”. If ANPA missions were to make a more lasting and fundamental contribution, the executive argued, they should seek to do more to support “contemporary medical education” as part of a wider, formal and strategic collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Health on the development of national health policy. Acknowledging that “large pools of tremendous talent remain within our medical schools”, the ANPA executive proposed that the organisation should partner such local institutions, augmenting their programmes with “education missions” that involve week-long series of lectures, workshops and symposia.

Echoing ANPA’s presentation to the session, an executive of the Medical Association of Nigerian Specialists and General Practitioners in the British Isles (MANSAG) was similarly modest about the ‘enlightenment’ value of the ‘medical missions’ conducted by his organisation. Noting that the six or seven medical missions conducted by MANSAG since its formation in 1997 were “only a drop in the ocean”, Dr Okolo argued that the organisation was particularly concerned about “what happens when we leave”. Consequently, he announced that MANSAG was anxious that its missions started “doing training to create a longer lasting legacy”. To this end, Dr Okolo proposed that MANSAG should work with ANPA to initiate “Surgical Skills Medical Missions”. These would rely, he suggested, on constructing and equipping “Surgical Skills Laboratories” within one or two Nigerian medical institutions. This proposed 3-year project would in turn rely on obtaining state and international donor funding and, upon completion, would provide the necessary facilities in which teams of diasporic medics could conduct the enhanced mode of medical mission more oriented towards the training of local surgeons.

Clearly, the representatives of ANPA and MANSAG were more confident of the value of diasporic expertise than many of the local practitioners and individual diasporic

medics in the session. Yet, there was an acknowledgement among ‘home’-based medics in the session and my research more generally that there were indeed some cutting-edge ideas and practices, particularly relating to recent technological advances, to which medics in Nigeria could usefully be ‘exposed’ by their diaspora counterparts. However, there was something of a consensus among both ‘home’-based and diasporic medics that the intellectual capacity to perform many, if not most, of the medical procedures conducted on diasporic missions existed locally. Furthermore, it was made clear that if diasporic medical professionals and their associations are to remit and instil at ‘home’ those knowledges and competencies that might be regarded as new and useful, they would not only have to somehow contribute to the development of the necessary facilities and infrastructure but also enhance ‘medical missions’ so that they devoted more attention to engaging and training local practitioners rather than simply providing direct treatment to patients.

Attempts by other diasporic professional associations to transmit ‘home’ their overseas ‘exposure’ can also be seen as rather limited in terms of the novelty of the ideas and expertise they offer and their ability to transfer any such ‘social remittances’ successfully. In seeking to transfer ‘home’ “ideas”, “knowledge” and “skills” in support of “engineering development in Nigeria”<sup>14</sup>, the London-based Engineering Forum of Nigerians (EFN) has, since its inaugural event in 2004, consistently sought to ‘remit’ the notion of undertaking infrastructural projects through ‘public-private partnership’. However, as the High Commissioner and other representatives of the Nigerian state have made clear at EFN events, the idea of engaging the private sector in infrastructural development has been a cornerstone of the ‘reform programme’ initiated by President Obasanjo in 1999 and later enshrined in the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy launched in 2004. On what is a key idea for EFN’s executives, then, engagement with state officials can be seen to represent a meeting of minds rather than a moment of diaspora-induced ‘enlightenment’.

Similarly, in attempting to contribute to the improvement of engineering education and training in Nigeria, EFN has advocated that the teaching of engineering in the Nigerian university system should move away from its overbearing focus on theory towards better preparing graduates for the practical and commercial aspects of the profession. However, completely unaware of EFN and its objectives, the director of a key Federal

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<sup>14</sup> [www.efn.org.uk](http://www.efn.org.uk)



Government agency responsible for engineering development in Nigeria has been vigorously pursuing exactly this vision for change since his appointment in 2003. Trained in Nigeria and Canada in the 1970s and with nearly 20 years experience of teaching and administration in one of Nigeria's premier universities, he is all too aware that the stark decline of the Nigerian university system under economic crisis and military rule during the 1980s and 90s means that today's engineering graduates "don't have any practical skills, [...] only [...] their certificate and some theories in their head" (Interview, Abuja, October 2005).

Significantly, he traces this fundamental challenge in engineering training and practice in Nigeria not so much to the "problem of brain drain" but rather to an absence of adequate infrastructure; "there are still professors here teaching, but the laboratories and workshops are really down with outdated equipment and facilities that are not functioning". Consequently, he argues that the most useful contribution diasporic engineers could make would be to use their financial capital and commercial connections to assist his agency in its attempt to 'resuscitate' and equip the nation's Industrial and Technology Development Centres. Only when such physical infrastructure is in place, he contends, will diasporic engineers be able to assist local experts in imparting more practical and commercial skills in the next generation of engineering graduates.

Despite the infrastructural constraints on the development of applied engineering knowledge and expertise in Nigeria, EFN has pressed ahead with its first programmatic attempt to promote practical and commercial engineering skills at 'home'. Launched in Lagos in July 2006, the Higher Education Engineering Challenge (HEEC) tasks undergraduate students of engineering and technology in Nigeria with designing an innovative and marketable engineering product, device, or system relevant to a given issue "considered of vital importance to national development" ([www.efn.org.uk/heec.htm](http://www.efn.org.uk/heec.htm)). The extent to which the HEEC has been able to inspire participants to somehow overcome the infrastructural challenges that they face in their universities is unclear.

However, the HEEC has at least enabled EFN to forge some embryonic linkages with the Lagos-based Nigerian Society of Engineers (NSE). The NSE hosted the launch of the HEEC in Lagos and subsequently sent its immediate past president to EFN's 2007

'Spring Event' in London. For Dr Christopher Kolade, the Nigerian High Commissioner to the UK, the presence of a senior NSE representative at this occasion was significant as it made EFN one of the few UK-based Nigerian professional associations to have responded to his call to 'host' esteemed professional counterparts from Nigeria. So doing, the High Commissioner contended in his address to the event, enabled diasporans to "see that there are Nigerians of real worth over there". Such a realisation would, he continued, encourage a move away from "diaspora focussed forums" towards a "marriage between what we have here and what we have there". Indeed, His Excellency concluded that it would only be through forging such transnational alliances with like-minded and similarly highly trained and experienced counterparts at 'home' that diasporic professionals would be able to contribute their expertise to the project of change in Nigeria.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the great progressive promise attached to social remittances in globalising discourses of diaspora and development, it is clear that there are notable limits to the extent to which London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations can be seen to transfer home new and useful ideas, knowledge, practices and skills. At the local level, communal diaspora organisations such as 'hometown associations' and 'ethnic unions' are not seen in their communities of origin as sources of innovative ways of thinking and doing development. Significantly, it is individuals and organisations based in the ancestral homeland itself and its 'internal diaspora' within Nigerian that are identified as the prime agents of 'enlightenment'.

Similarly, while some diaspora NGOs undoubtedly enjoy much success in disseminating at 'home' ideas, behaviours and skills that are considered new and/or developmentally beneficial, it is clear that they are far from pioneering or unique in so doing and they are certainly not the most significant actors in this process. Indeed, it is local NGOs that appear to have led the way in diffusing such 'enlightenment' and they remain much more important agents of this than their diasporic counterparts. Furthermore, despite the high value attached to diasporic professionals and their organisations in the nation-building initiatives of the Nigerian state, there are considerable doubts both in diaspora and at 'home' as to the novelty and utility of the expertise they offer. There is a notable consensus that much of the knowledge and many

of the skills held by diasporic professionals can readily be found among their colleagues at 'home'.

It is clear that there is a danger of over-celebrating diasporic expertise and, in the process, eliding and devaluing the wealth of human and intellectual capital that exists locally. This can only serve to undermine the formation of the transnational cooperation upon which any utilisation of diasporic knowledge and skills will depend. Moreover, it is also clear that the employment of innovative ideas and practices often relies upon the creation of an enabling infrastructural environment. As we will see in Chapter 9, it can be argued that until this is achieved to a greater extent in Nigeria, the possibility of fully harnessing its human and intellectual capital, whether diasporic or local, is severely constrained.

## ***Part 4: constraining collective transnational power***

## **8. Constraining collective transnational power I: the limits of diasporic mobilisation and the challenges of developing in diaspora**

### **Introduction**

In Chapters 6 and 7, it was argued that London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations do not appear to contribute to development at 'home' to the extent that might be expected of them in globalising discourses of diaspora and development. While there is a strong sense that it may well be beyond the capacity of these groups to meet such expectations, it is clear that there is considerable doubt and often deep frustration about the extent to which they fulfil the transnational potential that they do have. In this chapter, I explore the factors that are seen to prevent diaspora organisations from fulfilling the expectations not only of globalising discourses of diaspora and development but also of their own members and 'home'-based beneficiaries.

In so doing, I build on a strand of work that has attempted to restrain dominant idealisations of migrant transnationalism by drawing attention to realities of diasporic life that can limit the desire and ability of migrants and their descendents to contribute to 'home' (de Hann 1999; Al-Ali et al 2001b; Ammassari and Black 2001; Mohan and Zack-Williams 2002; Sørensen et al 2003b). This work draws particular attention to how the socio-economic condition of diasporans profoundly affects their ability to intervene at 'home'. In this way, the fortunes of individuals in diaspora and at 'home' are seen to be intimately linked. As Mohan and Zack-Williams (2002: 227) assert in an African context, "the well-being of diasporic Africans and Africa are not distinct activities, but mutually implicated".

Concurring strongly with such arguments, diasporic respondents consistently contend that the challenges of settling and progressing in the UK constitute a major constraint on the ability of diasporans to initiate and support collective transnational intervention at 'home'. Indeed, the difficulties of developing in diaspora are seen to underlie two of the greatest constraints on the vitality and transnational capacity of diaspora organisations, namely, a lack of funds and limited levels of participation. Together, these closely related problems of mobilising human and financial resources are widely seen to

undermine severely the sustainability and transnational aspirations of many if not most diaspora organisations, greatly constraining their ability to produce transformative effects at ‘home’.

For many in diaspora and especially at ‘home’, the limits to diasporic mobilisation are a product not only of the challenges of living and progressing ‘abroad’ but also of an increasingly individualistic and self-indulgent diasporic disposition. Posited as either a product of diasporic exposure to ‘Western’ individualism or a reflection of the social atomisation created by political and economic crisis at ‘home’, this disposition is seen to disrupt and denude ‘traditional’ systems of obligation to extended family and wider community, eroding the desire of diasporans to come together for the benefit of ‘home’.

Indeed, it may well be that the transnational abilities and desires of diasporans are simply not as strong as is often assumed in celebratory discourses of diaspora and development. It is clear that these discourses need to give much more recognition to the individual challenges and immediate family needs and desires that diasporans, much like anyone it might be argued, have to face before they can think of extending concern and benevolence to wider kin and community. Such a recognition is critical to thinking through ways in which the state and international agencies can most effectively engage and support collective transnational intervention. Indeed, while much attention has been paid to the idea of advancing development funding directly to diaspora organisations, it would seem that policies designed to facilitate diasporic progress in the ‘host’ society have as much, if not more, potential for strengthening the capacity of diasporans to organise and intervene transnationally.

### **“Money is like a barrier”<sup>1</sup>: the financial limits to collective transnational intervention**

For their members, by far the most important constraint on the transnational capabilities of diaspora organisations is a severe and sometimes completely debilitating lack of funds. For example, the chairman of an Egba-Yoruba ‘hometown association’ formed in 1995 bemoans that the organisation has made no progress in realising its main transnational objective of constructing a “befitting community hall” at ‘home’ because it has raised nowhere near the £50,000 required to undertake the project (Interview,

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<sup>1</sup> Ukpenwa Women’s Association member, interview, London, April 2005.

London, May 2005). Furthermore, he laments that the association has not even been able to accumulate the £3,000 it wishes to spend on providing “sanitation facilities” for “disadvantaged old people” in the ancestral community. Indeed, the organisation has managed to raise only £500 for the benefit of ‘home’, a sum which the chairman took to the community and spent on holding a party for its children. Given the paucity of funds, the organisation deemed it pointless to continue reporting its finances to the UK Charity Commission, with which it registered in 1995. Consequently, the organisation was deemed “inactive” and removed from the Register of Charities in 2002. “What am I supposed to report when there is nothing to report”, the Chairman complains, “there are no finances to report!”

Similarly, an Ijebu-Yoruba ‘hometown association’ formed in the mid-1990s once purchased from a London charity shop some “goods” and “materials” for the development of ‘home’ but was unable to ship them to Nigeria for want of sufficient funds (Organisation chairman, interview, London, September 2004). More recently, this association was disappointed that it was unable to respond positively to requests for financial assistance from two ‘home’-based community organisations supporting blind people and people living with HIV/AIDS. Indeed, a lack of funds means that this association has been unable to make any tangible interventions in the development of ‘home’.

My fieldwork data are replete with such accounts of financial limitations constraining severely or undermining completely the transnational capacity of diaspora organisations. A lack of funds is identified as the primary reason why an Ijesha-Yoruba ‘hometown association’ and the diaspora NGOs International Aid and Nigeria Action have had to suspend their modest financial and material remittances to the respective community, health, and educational institutions they had supported at ‘home’. Members of an Igbo ‘town union’ lament that the organisation’s central transnational aspiration to ‘resuscitate’ electricity and pipe-borne water supply in their ancestral community remains an unfulfilled dream due to limited finances. And in the case of Nigerian Women for Development, the director regrets that a paucity of funds means that its proposed headline project at ‘home’, the construction of a ‘development centre’ for ‘grassroots’ women in the Niger Delta, has advanced little beyond the plan displayed on the wall of the organisation’s London office.

Even diaspora organisations that have been able to fund more notable progress in realising their transnational aspirations tend to find that financial limitations remain the major constraint on their border-spanning activities. While the Ayege National Progress Union (ANPU), London has been able to finance more contributions to 'home' than many other geo-ethnic unions, the nature, scope, and intensity of its cross-border interventions are still seen to be compromised significantly by its limited monetary resources. As an ANPU London stalwart reflects:

[W]hen it comes to time of spending, you look at the purse and look at the cost and the purse is quite small and therefore the things you want to achieve will be quite small as well. If you had a purse that was say twenty, thirty thousand pounds, then you would look at, "OK, what do we want to do? We want to put in street lights? We can afford that". £10,000 converted to the currency would be a few millions. [...]. But when you only have £2,000, you cannot use everything, so you are going to be able to use maybe 10% of that. So you can only do something worth £500 or £200. So limitation of finances is a very, very major issue and I think that is a major limiting factor [...]. (Interview, London, June 2005)

Similarly, despite enjoying some relative success in funding its transnational aspirations, the diaspora NGO Development Impact for Nigeria (DIFN), founded in 1999, is still seen to be heavily constrained by financial limitations in its attempts to establish and sustain community health and development programmes at 'home'. As the founder of the organisation and the principal architect of its transnational vision, Mr Yomi Oloko is especially disappointed that financial constraints have meant that DIFN has been unable to extend its work much beyond the Lagos district of Ipaja, frustrating its founding desire to intervene in communities across Nigeria. Echoing this frustration, a local church leader who is regularly involved in the organisation's seminars and workshops insists, "DIFN needs to be better funded so it can expand beyond the scope of just handling a few individuals here, they need the resources to have a national network" (Interview, Ipaja, August 2005). As another close associate of DIFN's programmes in Ipaja opines, "if it is funded well, it will have been larger than this, it won't just be a local thing" (Interview, Ipaja, August 2005).

DIFN's UK-based trustees and its local programme staff and participants express further frustration that even within the limited confines of Ipaja, funds have not allowed the organisation to implement the full range of programmes it originally envisaged. Indeed, it is argued that financial constraints have prevented the inauguration of several



projects central to the founding vision, such as an annual youth carnival and a livelihood training and micro-credit scheme for young mothers and people living with HIV/AIDS. As Pastor Bode Omokaro, DIFN's Nigeria Coordinator, laments, "[...] because of limited resources many of our programmes we have to shelve, sometimes we plan a programme and at the last minute we just have to stop it..." (Interview, Ipaja, December 2005). Indeed, financial constraints have compromised even established DIFN programmes. For example, a lack of funds forced the cancellation of the 2005 teacher training workshop for the Child-to-Child Health Club programme and meant that it was necessary to halve the number of invited participants for that year's summer youth camp. As the headmistress of a local primary school that was asked to send pupils to the camp contends, "If they were well-funded, they wouldn't have to restrict those to come to the camp, [...]" (Interview, Ipaja, September 2005).

Despite representing diasporans who have trained for potentially lucrative careers, associations of diasporic professionals also tend to identify financial limitations as the major constraint on their attempts to contribute to the development of 'home'. For example, while the Engineering Forum of Nigerians (EFN) was finally able to launch its Higher Education Engineering Challenge in Nigeria in July 2006, over a year after it was first announced, the organisation reported in January 2007 that finance for the project was "still short of the target budget", delaying further its final execution (EFN newsletter, January 2007: 1). Furthermore, a senior, founding EFN executive argues that it is a lack of funds that has prevented the organisation from inaugurating its other planned programmes, such as instituting a new chair of engineering in a Nigerian university and organising internships in the UK for 'home'-based Nigerian engineering students. As an active EFN member asserts, "[W]e need money" (Interview, London, July 2006).

### **'The burden is always on just a few': collective transnational intervention and the limits to diasporic participation**

There is, then, an overwhelming sense that a lack of funds often compromises significantly, and even undermines completely, the contribution of London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations to development at 'home'. Indeed, financial constraints are often seen to constitute the most debilitating limitation on collective transnational benevolence. Concurring that "finances" represent "the major problem" for diaspora

organisations in their attempts to intervene at 'home', Mr Samuels, a senior official in the Federal Government's diaspora engagement agency, hints at what is for many respondents a key reason why this might be; "One of the shortcomings of all the Nigerian [diaspora] organisations [is] poor commitment".

Indeed, my fieldwork data suggest very strongly that London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations tend to enjoy low levels of active participation and support from their respective diasporic constituencies, constraining significantly their ability to attract and organise resources that can be deployed transnationally. Such organisations are generally forged and sustained by a small, committed minority within their respective constituencies. While an active core of a few, and sometimes even just one or two, individuals attempt, and often struggle, to create and continue a diaspora organisation, the majority of nominal or potential participants tends to be involved either irregularly or not at all.

Despite drawing on the supposedly strong affective ties of 'primary patriotism', even geo-ethnic diaspora organisations appear to attract very limited participation from their diasporic constituencies. For example, the President and the Secretary of an Ijebu-Yoruba 'hometown association' argue that "very few" of their fellow UK-based indigenes are registered as members of the organisation (Interviews, London, September 2004). Even amongst the dozen or so who have registered, commitment and activity levels are considered to be all too low with the financing and conduct of most associational business apparently left to the executives and, particularly, the President.

Similarly, the President of an Ijesha-Yoruba 'hometown association' notes that the organisation has only eight "active" members despite there being "far more" of his fellow indigenes based in the UK than the sixty or so who attended the association's last fundraising event held some years ago (Interview, London, April 2005). Not even the eight 'active' members can be relied upon to participate regularly, the President complains, meaning that associational meetings sometimes attract as few as three attendees. Indeed, the President contends that unless he makes the effort to "phone around" to remind and implore members to attend, the official, supposedly bi-monthly gatherings do not hold at all; in 2005, for example, only one meeting was successfully organised (Interview, London, January 2006).

Concordantly, a founding member of an Ekiti-Yoruba 'hometown association' asserts that although there are "dozens" of his fellow indigenes in the UK, the organisation has only three nuclear families as "active" members (Interview, London, May 2005). Again, this 'town union' struggles to get even its few 'active' members to attend meetings regularly. Indeed, while associational gatherings are supposed to be monthly, one had not been held for four months. And even though the organisation is able to make contact with some twenty UK-based co-ethnics beyond the 'active' membership, only about five of these tend to respond positively to the association's requests for funds for its proposed interventions at 'home'.

The limited participation and support that geo-ethnic diaspora organisations are able to attract from their respective constituencies mean that the task of sustaining these groups falls heavily on a small number of active members, constraining significantly the transnational capacity and potential of diasporic geo-ethnic associational life. Estimating that there are over 200 of their fellow Omoyeges resident in the UK, members of the Ayege National Progress Union (ANPU), London, bemoan that the organisation has only 15 to 20 active members. As committed member Mrs Ademola notes, "[W]e are many here even though we are just like few people in the meeting" (Interview, London, April 2006). Indeed, ANPU London stalwart Mr Akinmade rues, "there are a lot of people that are not involved" (Interview, London, July 2005). With such limited participation from the UK-based Omoyege population, Mrs Obafemi argues, "The level of participation from individuals varies a lot and that's why the burden is always on just a few as opposed to a lot of people and that makes it more tasking, so that's a constraint" (Interview, London, July 2005). As another ANPU London contends, "the lifeline of the Association for the past 12-15 years has been the same 15 or so members", adding:

[Y]ou have people who are particularly, always, interested, at any cost, to keep on going even if it means they now have to fund more. I mean, individually now, we contribute maybe £10 each [per month] and we also have auctions where we are the same people who vie for the auction items [...] and also we are the same people who, if we need to carry out an event or project, we levy ourselves £100 flat. So I think on funding-wise, [...], the amount of money that is coming from the same pocket, has been coming a little bit difficult. (Interview, London, June 2005)

Indeed, with the 'burden' of sustaining geo-ethnic diaspora associations tending to fall heavily on a few committed members, there is a strong sense that the long-term survival of such groups is at risk. With UK-based Ukpewans estimating that their numbers run into the hundreds, the President of the Ukpewa Women's Association UK (UWA) reports, "I can confidently say that we have only 24 members" (Interview, London, April 2006). Even within this nominal membership, active participation appears to be limited. The UWA's monthly gatherings that I attended attracted an average of only 10 members and the President reports, "even out of the 24 people that we have on our membership list, I can say that only about half of those attend meetings regularly". Highlighting active members' concerns about the consequences of such limited participation, Mrs Ohaje, a stalwart of the UWA since its formation in 1992, recalls that there have been times when she feared that the association would "lay down completely" (Interview, London, June 2006). Having become acutely aware of this danger during her two-year term as UWA Treasurer between 2002 and 2004, Mrs Ohaje issued in her end of tenure report an impassioned appeal to UK-based Ukpewan women:

[...]In my role as Treasurer it has become increasingly apparent that the majority of work is carried out by a minority of devoted members. In addition to this, it has been noticed that some members have not paid their membership fee. These funds are needed for daily management and to keep the UWA afloat. [...]It is important that more Ukpewan women join the group to provide resource, experience and the much needed financial assistance which will enable us to continue our charity. (UWA annual report, 2004)

Diaspora organisations grounded in professional identities also tend to rely on a small core of active members and see the limited participation and support they attract from their respective constituencies as undermining their sustainability and transnational activities. For example, while the Engineering Forum of Nigerians (EFN) has succeeded in attracting nearly 200 members since its formation in 2002, its President is anxious to sign-up a much higher proportion of the 3,000 or so Nigerian engineers and engineering students he estimates are based in the UK. Indeed, with the financial returns from this rather modest level of membership having proved insufficient, EFN's activities at 'home' and 'abroad' have depended heavily on the largesse of a handful of the organisation's members, especially the sponsorship provided by two of its founding executives through the engineering companies they respectively own. In addition to having been the main sponsors of EFN's first four annual 'Spring Events' in London,

these stalwarts were two of the most benevolent among a group of only 11 members who had, as of January 2007, made donations to the association's first attempt at a programmatic intervention in Nigeria, its Higher Education Engineering Challenge (HEEC). With so few members having donated to the pioneering HEEC project, it was "still short of the target budget" (EFN newsletter, January 2007), delaying further the implementation of a transnational intervention that had been publicly announced back in April 2005. As a committed EFN member contends, "the major problem is just getting more members who buy into the cause of the association" (Interview, London, July 2006).

The President of the British Nigeria Law Forum (BNLF) shares such concerns that limited participation and a heavy reliance on a few key individuals can undermine the sustainability and transnational capabilities of diasporic professional associations. Addressing the 35 or so people gathered for a 2005 BNLF seminar, the President bemoaned that there were "many more" Nigerian lawyers in the UK than the 60 to 70 who had expressed "interest" in the organisation since its formation in late 2002. If the BNLF is to realise its aspiration to engage and influence processes of legal, democratic, and business reform in Nigeria, he argued, it would need "strength in numbers". "We need to get bigger", he declared. Furthermore, praising one of his fellow executives for "keeping the Forum going", he implored existing members to become more actively involved. "We all need to take responsibility for the group", he insisted, adding, "Otherwise it is left to one or two people and it won't make an impact".

Indeed, an organisation of UK-based Nigerian nurses originally founded in the late 1990s exemplifies how limited participation and an over-dependence on a few committed members can undermine the impact of diasporic professional associations. While it claims to represent "approximately 3,000 Nigerian nurses"<sup>2</sup> in the UK, this organisation had even at its height in 2002 only about 50 members. Its President laments that the association suffered a complete lull in activity between 2003 and 2005 and that, as a consequence, its membership has become even smaller. Indeed, at the association's first public event after what its President described as its "two-year holiday", there were only 8 or 9 members present. The Secretary noted that the majority of these were the association's original founding members and stressed that the association would have to achieve some notable success in its renewed "membership

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<sup>2</sup> Organisation document, n.d..

drive” if it was ever to be in a position to rekindle its efforts to make financial and material donations to care facilities in Nigeria.

Diaspora NGOs tend to endure even greater struggles to survive and sustain their transnational interventions in the face of low levels of diasporic participation and support. Indeed, these organisations generally depend very heavily on just one or two individuals and attract little involvement and benevolence from the wider diaspora, making their sustainability and attempts to contribute to development at ‘home’ especially precarious. For example, Nigerian Women for Development (NWD) relies overwhelmingly on the individual efforts of Mrs Ikendu, who founded the organisation in 1994. While Mrs Ikendu has made appeals in the diasporic African media and enjoys an extensive array of contacts among London’s Nigerian population, she has been unable to attract any substantial or sustained support for NWD from her fellow UK-based nationals. This means that the organisation faces a constant struggle to survive on the small grants it is intermittently awarded for its community welfare work in London and has no funds to undertake its main transnational aspiration, the construction of a ‘development centre’ for ‘grassroots’ women in the Niger Delta.

While Development Impact for Nigeria (DIFN) has enjoyed some relative success by attracting a team of six trustees, only four attend the organisation’s quarterly meetings and occasional public events with any regularity. Furthermore, it is recognised among the trustees that Mr Yomi Oloko, who established DIFN in 1999, and his fellow founding trustee and close friend, Mr Ade Fashade, are overwhelmingly responsible for sustaining the organisation, the former providing the bulk of its intellectual and financial resources while the latter undertakes most of the administrative work. Moreover, Yomi’s dream that 100 UK-based Nigerians would become members and donate £10 a month remains far from being realised. Indeed, although the trustees have been reaching out “for years”<sup>3</sup> to family, friends, contacts and the wider diaspora, they have succeeded in encouraging only 5 of their fellow UK-based Nigerians to join DIFN and commit to the desired monthly pledge. “And that’s why we’ve found it difficult to sustain the work that we do”, rues Ade (Interview, London, July 2006). “The trustees, especially Yomi, fund most of what we do”, he argues, adding, “but that can’t continue, it’s not sustainable, we can’t sustain that type of giving really”.

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<sup>3</sup> Yomi Oloko, interview, London, June 2006.

Significantly, it would seem that limited diasporic support can indeed make diaspora NGOs and their transnational interventions unsustainable. For example, since founding International Aid in 1996, Mr Uchedu has enjoyed little success in attracting the participation and benevolence of his fellow diasporans. Indeed, the organisation has had to depend almost entirely on the time and money of its founder and his wife. However, by the year 2000, Mr and Mrs Uchedu could no longer afford to finance the organisation. In the continued absence of any notable support from the wider diaspora, it became impossible for International Aid to function, heralding the termination of its efforts to improve the healthcare of “disadvantaged”<sup>4</sup> people in Nigeria. Indeed, we have seen that low levels of active participation and support tend to constrain significantly and even undermine completely the vitality, sustainability and transnational capabilities of diaspora organisations.

**“A sick doctor will not be able to look after his patients”: collective transnational intervention and the difficulties of developing in diaspora**

When it comes to accounting for the limited financial strength and low levels of active participation and support generally enjoyed by London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations, diasporic respondents point overwhelmingly and most readily to what they see as the socio-economic challenges confronting Nigerians living in the UK. Indeed, the involvement and benevolence diaspora organisations are able to attract from their respective constituencies are routinely seen to be severely constrained by the generally unfavourable position of these constituencies in the UK economy and society. In the face of what are considered to be the often harsh realities of diasporic existence, many, if not most, UK-based Nigerians are seen to be struggling to secure an income that can satisfy individual and family needs let alone any desires to participate in and support diaspora organisations and their transnational interventions at ‘home’. Consequently, it is consistently asserted that the majority of Nigerians in the UK lack the means to become involved in, and contribute to, diasporic associational life to the extent that they might wish. Indeed, it is often argued that the travails of living in the UK mean that many members of diaspora organisations are unable to participate as actively as they might want and that many, if not most, diasporans are unable to participate at all.

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<sup>4</sup> Mr Uchedu, interview, London, May 2005.

In detailing the constraining hardships of diasporic life, organised diasporans frequently emphasise that it is often hard for Nigerians to find employment in the UK. Indeed, a 2009 report for the UK Department for Communities and Local Government on 'The Nigerian Muslim Community in England' found that there was particular concern about "high levels of unemployment amongst British-born Nigerians and new [Nigerian] migrants" (Change Institute 2009: 29). Furthermore, both this report and my respondents suggest that if Nigerians do find employment in the UK, it often involves doing multiple low paid, menial jobs that leave little money and time free to devote to diasporic associational life. The President of an Ijebu-Yoruba 'hometown association' contends that those of 'his people' in the UK who have secured employment tend to "work long and for little" (Interview, London, September 2004). Consequently, he asserts that "most" of his fellow UK-based indigenes "don't have a lot of money" and are "too busy" to participate actively in the association. Indeed, he contends that it is a struggle even for him as the President to find the time and resources to contribute to the union, pointing out that despite being a qualified accountant, he has had to settle for a modest income working often unsociable, 12-hour long shifts as a residential warden. Seeing such employment situations as inhibiting the bulk of his UK-based co-ethnics from participating actively in the association, the President laments, "We only have what a few committed members can afford and that is not much".

Concordantly, the Vice-President of the Ayege National Progress Union (ANPU), London complains, "We are limited in how much we can raise amongst ourselves", adding, "We have a problem of development here" (Interview, London, May 2005). "Most have not progressed much", he continues of his co-ethnics in the UK, the vast bulk of whom are seen to have settled from the early 1980s onwards as part of the notable emigration triggered by the entrenchment of political and economic crisis in Nigeria. "[A]mongst us, I see a lot of people who are still where they were many, many years ago", he reports, adding "[they are] still doing the same kind of job; security, mini-cabbing, menial jobs, just assistants in offices [...]". "They are still living in the small flats that they lived in when they first got here", he observes, "They are just marking time".

Suggesting that many UK-based Nigerians have indeed been facing difficult conditions for some time, a London-based Nigerian academic wrote in 1993, "The slang *fa gbùrù* ('to do menial jobs' or 'to struggle for work among other commitments in order to



survive’) is a well known phrase in general use by the Yorùbá community in London” (Oyètádé 1993: 72). Moreover, a recent major study of migrant workers in low paid employment in London identified a strong presence of Nigerians in the ‘Migrant Division of Labour’ found at the ‘bottom end’ of London’s labour market (Wills et al 2009). For example, the study found that “black Africans mainly from Ghana or Nigeria made up 40 percent of workers in office cleaning, over two-thirds (79%) of those employed as cleaners on the London Underground and over half of care workers surveyed (63%)” (Herbert et al 2008: 106). Mirroring the accounts of my respondents, the study highlights the poor conditions, profound struggles and lack of socio-economic mobility faced by London’s low-paid migrant workers and details their ‘coping tactics’, such as maximising overtime and taking multiple jobs, as they attempt to “‘get by’, if only just, on a day-to-day basis” (Datta et al 2007a: 404).

Asserting that such travails and a general lack of “success” in the UK have driven some of her fellow diasporans into “mental hospitals”, Mrs Ohaje, a stalwart of the Ukpenwa Women’s Association (UWA), the Ukpenwa Development Union (UDU), and the Wazobia State Union (WSU), argues that participating in geo-ethnic diaspora organisations simply represents too much of a financial commitment for many UK-based Nigerians:

Some people don’t earn much, [...], you have to pay dues to come [to monthly meetings], and when you come there, there are other hidden expenditures. And you have to pay your transport to go there [...]. So coming to meetings is a problem [...]. (Interview, London, June 2006)

Mrs Emanu, an active member of the UWA and WSU concurs, stating, “[A] lot of people don’t come, [...], [...] because of the financial burden [...], they can’t afford it” (Interview, London, April 2006). Furthermore, like many members of geo-ethnic diaspora organisations, she also highlights the problem of the “time factor”, arguing, “[I]t’s not that rosy in this country, you know. Some people do two jobs to survive, some people work during the weekends and so they can’t come to meetings [...]”.

Similarly, a founding trustee of the diaspora NGO Development Impact for Nigeria (DIFN) contends, “[...M]ost Nigerians here are still really struggling” (Interview, London, July 2006). Significantly, he believes that this is a key reason why DIFN has enjoyed so little success in its aim to attract 100 UK-based Nigerians to donate £10 a

month to the organisation's community health and development projects in Nigeria. As this trustee rues, "When people are struggling to sustain themselves here in the UK, let alone meet their extended family commitments back home in Nigeria, then they are hardly going to have the money to give to an organisation like DIFN" (See also Datta et al 2007a and b on how difficult it can be for Nigerian and other low-paid migrant workers in London to send remittances 'home').

In accounting for the unfavourable socio-economic condition that is seen to undermine the ability of many UK-based Nigerians to participate in diasporic associational life, organised diasporans tend to point first to the problem of securing legal settlement. For example, a founding member of an Igbo 'town union' claims that many of his fellow diasporans are "without papers" and therefore not only "have to do menial jobs" but are also prone to being "cheated" by employers who "threaten to call the Home Office" (Interview, London, May 2005). Similarly, the Chairman of an Egba-Yoruba 'hometown association' contends that many of 'his people' are "just languishing here without papers", making it "difficult for them to earn much money" (Interview, London, May 2005). Indeed, the Change Institute (2009: 29) argues that recent attempts to tighten the UK immigration system "have been identified as contributing to an increase in the number of undocumented Nigerians working in London" and reports, "Examples were given of qualified but undocumented Nigerian people in the country working illegally for as little as two pounds an hour".

Significantly, the Chairman of the Egba-Yoruba 'hometown association' noted above asserts that the many of his fellow UK-based co-ethnics who are "without papers" and live "underground" generally earn so little that they often have "no money left" to send 'home' to their family, let alone to contribute to the union and its transnational vision. Indeed, the problem of settling legally in the UK is widely posited as a key barrier to participating in and supporting diasporic associational life. As a committed member of the Ukpenna Women's Association UK asserts, "[...S]ome people maybe their immigration status doesn't permit them to do the kind of work they want to do and have that money as much as they want to, so there are lots of forces that can debar you [from being involved]" (Interview, London, April 2005). Concordantly, a stalwart of Ayege National Progress Union (ANPU), London notes:

[...T]he new ones just coming [to the UK], [...] they've not really been featuring at ANPU meetings. [...]. There should be new members around though, [...], [but] I've not really heard of any, either they're lying low or they're not showing their faces because I know there are a lot of Nigerians in Britain that don't have papers. (Interview, London, July 2005)

Furthermore, the struggle to settle legally in the UK is seen to retard the socio-economic progress of many diasporans in the long-term, undermining their ability to contribute to diasporic associational life even after they have acquired legal settlement. Reflecting on the experiences of his fellow members, the vast majority of whom, like him, arrived in the UK between the early 1980s and early 1990s and have since secured legal settlement, an active member of ANPU London explains:

[...]In terms of financial achievement, I would say amongst us it's been very poor. Why? [...] I think a lot of people spent too much time having to study just to remain legal in the country. In those early years, some of them had previous degrees from home but they'd never practise because they really couldn't work as they had to be students [to get a visa] [...]. They saw themselves as just marking time to be able to reside in the UK and that hampered a lot of progress in those early years. [...]A lot of them were not able to invest in property because they didn't have any legal standing and, like you know, real estate [...] has become a major, booming area but only for those who were invested in it. [...]. And [...] if you want to do business, you have to take a risk but they didn't [...] because [...] if you took more risk, you were more exposed and therefore that could lead to becoming expatriated back home [...]. So they were really, really hindered along the line. (Interview, London, June 2005)

The short- and long-term socio-economic constraints produced through the struggle to acquire legal settlement are widely seen to be compounded by the difficulty of having Nigerian qualifications recognised in the UK. Diasporans often rue that the long and debilitating years of military rule had by the mid-1990s ruined the Nigerian education system and its solid international reputation, meaning that qualifications obtained in Nigeria are no longer well regarded in the UK. As a founding executive of the Engineering Forum of Nigerians (EFN) explains:

When we came to the United Kingdom, I came in 1984, in those days, if you had a degree from the University of Lagos it was recognised readily by the institutions in England. So you can become a pupil engineer, you practise, and eventually you became a chartered member of an institution and so on. These days, unfortunately, that is not the case. Some of our guys have found their way into United

Kingdom by whatever means necessary and they now find themselves working as a chambermaid somewhere or cleaning the streets and so on and they're finding it difficult to enter into the engineering profession. When they present their credentials, their qualifications, no one recognises them. And, of course, if you've been to university, spending the whole of your time training to be an engineer, when you then find yourself sort of more or less doing some menial activities, you feel depressed and disappointed. (Interview, Lagos, September 2005)

Indeed, this EFN executive goes on to suggest that, deskilled and despondent, many Nigerian engineers who have arrived in the UK after EFN's founders are likely to feel that they lack not only the resources, connections, and experience to join and participate in the organisation, but also the self-esteem.

Beyond the difficulties of acquiring legal status and having Nigerian qualifications recognised, it is often decried that diasporans also face the challenge of racism and/or discrimination on the basis of national origin, hindering further their socio-economic advancement and their ability to participate in and contribute to diaspora organisations and their transnational activities. For example, Mrs Temitope, the founder of a diaspora NGO promoting Nigerian culture in the UK, argues that there is "no question" that "discrimination" exists against "black people" in the UK labour market (Interview, London, September 2004; See also Datta et al 2007b and Herbert et al 2008 on Ghanaian and Nigerian workers' experiences of racism in London's labour market). Drawing on her own experiences and those of her "black friends", she contends, "If you go for a job and there are two people to choose from who are equally well qualified, you won't get it". Significantly, Mrs Temitope notes that it was only once she took the decision to become self-employed and successfully established her own management consultancy company that she began to make enough money to found her diaspora NGO.

Concordantly, in accounting for why many Nigerians "don't do so well" in the UK, the founder of another diaspora NGO begins by asserting, "There is the issue of racial discrimination. It is a *real* problem" (Interview, London, May 2005). Indeed, he contends that in his profession, an association of "black" practitioners had recently complained that "white" Australasian colleagues yet to complete their professional qualifications and with no experience were being employed over well-qualified and highly-experienced "black" practitioners. Signalling his keen interest in the response of

the profession's governing body, he rails, "What explanation can there be other than discrimination on the basis of race?" Like Mrs Temitope, he contends that in the face of such racial discrimination in the labour market, it was only by establishing his own business that he was able to acquire the means to found his diaspora NGO.

Pointing to overwhelmingly negative media portrayals of Nigeria and its nationals, diasporans often argue that the problem of racial discrimination is compounded by a particular prejudice towards Nigerians. Reflecting on her job as a housing manager for a local authority in London, Mrs Obafemi exemplifies how such prejudice is experienced in the workplace:

Like where I work, because of the sort of name that Nigerians have, like that they're very corrupt, card theft and credit card fraud and whatever, some people tend to think all Nigerians are like that, that they all have a price, but some of us don't, some of us don't.  
(Interview, London, July 2005)

Such experiences resonate strongly with those recorded in the Change Institute's 2009 report for the UK Department for Communities and Local Government on 'The Nigerian Muslim Community in England'. As the report asserts:

Respondents cited many examples of negative perceptions about Nigerians which they feel affect their employment prospects. These include negative perceptions of the Nigerian accent and the stereotypical image of Nigerians as 'fraudsters'. Many respondents felt very uncomfortable about the perceived media focus on trafficking, crime and document forgery, which they feel obscures the fact that the vast majority of Nigerian migrants are not criminals.  
(Change Institute 2009: 29)

Furthermore, Oyèládé (1993: 76) suggests that such negative stereotyping has been hindering the progress of UK-based Nigerians for some time, arguing that this unfair association with 'fraud' was making it "increasingly difficult" for them to open bank accounts, obtain loans, and generally do business even in the early 1990s.

Indeed, such is the apparently entrenched prejudice experienced by Nigerians and their descendents in the UK that nine diasporans came together in 2004 to form the Nigerian British Community Forum (NBCF). As a founding executive contends, the "main objective" of the Forum is "the eradication of stigma and the attendant prejudice which

we collectively suffer as a result of the intransigencies of a few” (Personal communication, July 2004).

Significantly, the Forum asserts that the dominant, discriminatory attitude towards UK-based Nigerians and their descendents “impacts negatively” not only on their “image” but also on their “opportunities as a community”<sup>5</sup>. Indeed, it is argued that it will only be when “Nigerian-British” people enjoy in the UK “an environment free of stigma and prejudice” that they will experience “optimal personal development and community upliftment”<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, linking the condition of diasporans in the ‘host’ society to their individual and collective transnational abilities, the NBCF’s submission to the British government’s Commission for Africa adds that the “empowerment” of “the African diaspora” is essential if it is to “participate fully in [Africa’s] development effort” (NBCF 2004: 2 and 4).

While it is clear that some diasporans have managed to bypass the challenges of entering the UK labour market by successfully establishing their own businesses (see also Styan 2007 and Change Institute 2009), there is a strong sense that many diasporans who turn to their own entrepreneurship enjoy limited success. For example, a member of an Igbo ‘town union’ argues that his own experience of business failure is indicative of a common trend among fellow ‘indigenes’ and other Nigerians in the UK. Drawing a contrast with Jewish and Indian diasporas which he sees as having become “very rich” through commerce and enterprise and therefore as “able to do a lot at home”, he bemoans, “My people are not doing so well here so it’s difficult to help at home” (Interview, London, May 2005).

Concordantly, the British Nigeria Law Forum (BNLF) devoted its 2005 annual seminar to “some of the difficulties encountered by small Nigerian [law] firms as they seek to establish themselves in the UK” (BNLF event flyer, 2005). This “practical workshop” centred on the problems experienced by such firms in complying with the practice standards laid down and regulated by the Law Society, particularly that of having a sufficient capital base. It was posited that a key reason for this was that lawyers trained in Nigeria, like those trained in most other overseas jurisdictions, have to prepare for and pass the Qualified Lawyers Transfer Test, an undertaking which, it was claimed,

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<sup>5</sup> [www.nigerianbritishcommunityforum.org.uk](http://www.nigerianbritishcommunityforum.org.uk)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

offers little instruction and practical preparation for establishing and managing a private practice. As the discussion at the event developed, a suggestion was made that the BNLF should establish a forum to assist “distressed” UK-based Nigerian-run law firms to overcome this challenge. Significantly, with only about 40 people gathered for the event, it was argued that so doing would help the Forum itself in what was seen as its pressing need to “be bigger”. If Nigerian lawyers enjoyed more success in the UK, it was asserted, they would be likely to participate in the BNLF in greater numbers and be able to make more substantial contributions to the organisation and its transnational vision.

**“It is only when we are comfortable that we are able to contribute to our community”: collective transnational intervention and the importance of ‘comfort’**

Overall, then, it is clear that diasporans are generally seen to face a range of difficulties that often hinder their socio-economic progress in the UK and that thereby constrain their ability to participate in and contribute to diasporic associational life. Indeed, we have explored how the often harsh realities of diasporic existence are seen to prevent many, if not most, diasporans from having any active involvement in diaspora organisations. Concordantly, those who dominate and sustain diaspora organisations are generally seen to come overwhelmingly from the rather limited ranks of relatively well-established and successful diasporans (cf. Sassen-Koob 1979; Grillo 1985; Schoeneberg 1985; Louis-Jacques 1991; Werbner and Anwar 1991; Vertovec 1996; Liu 1998; Owusu 2000; Riccio 2001; Smith 2002; Henry and Mohan 2003). For example, a stalwart of the Ayege National Progress Union (ANPU), London contends that it is only those of his co-ethnics who have enjoyed some relative socio-economic progress in the UK who can afford the time and money to join and sustain the union and its transnational activities. As he asserts, “[...]it is only when we are comfortable that we are able to contribute to our community” (Interview, London, July 2005).

Indeed, distinguishing themselves from many diasporans who do not participate actively in diasporic associational life, committed members of diaspora organisations tend to report that they have enjoyed some notable success in fulfilling their socio-economic aspirations in the UK. Having generally arrived in the UK prior to the early 1990s, active members of diaspora organisations overwhelmingly tend to have legal settlement and often full British citizenship. Committed organised diasporans also tend to have

good academic and/or professional qualifications, often including British and/or other internationally-recognised qualifications. Consequently, they routinely have relatively secure and well-paid white-collar employment and/or their own relatively successful business enterprises. Reflecting this, active members of diaspora organisations generally own property in London, most often former council flats and houses in the inner boroughs of the city, with many having been able to buy bigger homes in the suburbs in recent years, some even managing to retain and rent-out their original property.

Diasporic professional associations in particular tend to be dominated and sustained by diasporans who have enjoyed exceptional socio-economic success in the UK, often occupying very senior professional positions and/or owning major companies. For example, the Engineering Forum of Nigerians (EFN) boasts among its ranks the first 'black' university dean in the UK, London Underground's Director of Engineering and several senior members of UK engineering institutes. Indeed, EFN reports that "about 70% of members are in middle management earning in the range of £45-55K" and that a "smaller percentage own their businesses with turnover in excess of £1M" (EFN Newsletter, January 2007: 4). As Dr Christopher Kolade, the Nigerian High Commissioner to the UK, proclaimed in his address at the organisation's 2007 'Spring Event', "When I first met EFN, I found Nigerian engineers who are doing very well here".

Significantly, a founding executive of EFN contends that the socio-economic success of those who came to form the association was an essential precondition to its establishment:

[...W]e were the first generation of engineers who came to England and stayed to practise so we reached a stage in our careers where, [...], some of us have now got ourselves into senior positions, [...]. [...The formation of EFN] couldn't have happened before then because we didn't have anybody really who had risen to that sort of level of expertise and influence in the profession amongst the Nigerians in the United Kingdom. But by the time we set-up EFN we were all doing well, some of our friends were directors here and there, people who are senior managers in organisations, you know, people who have the expertise, influence, and a bit of money to start something like this. (Interview, Lagos, September 2005)

However, while committed members of diaspora organisations overwhelmingly tend to locate themselves among the most successful and 'comfortable' of their fellow UK-



based diasporans, they often lament that the demands of familial responsibility and the high cost of living in the UK, especially London, mean that diasporic existence remains something of a struggle and that they are therefore unable to support diasporic associational life as much as they might wish. As a stalwart of the Ukpemwa Women's Association UK bemoans:

[...T]he situation in this country, a lot of members having responsibilities, it's like trying too [...]. You have to work so hard, you are trying to pay your bill and then you are trying to pay your mortgage, pay this, pay that, pay this, pay that, you know, by the time you realise, there's nothing there. It's just kind of restricting some people in that organisation, they have the love, [...], you know, trying to support, but [...] they can't afford to as much as they want. (Interview, London, April 2005)

Complaining that the tax regime of the British government "mak[es] the yoke of the honest labourer heavy", a committed member of the Ayege National Progress Union (ANPU), London concurs:

[...]ndividual members are struggling, you know what the system is here, if you're not careful, you find that everything you have is based on one debt or the other. So even if people are running their businesses they still have to be careful. If you have a good house, you want to pay your mortgage, you don't want to get into trouble. So you need to take care of number one in terms of your finances. I mean, a sick doctor will not be able to look after his patients. (Interview, London, July 2005)

Indeed, such is the challenging and precarious nature of diasporic existence that even the relatively successful and 'comfortable' diasporans who overwhelmingly tend to dominate and sustain diaspora organisations are seen to be at risk of falling on 'hard times', potentially constraining or even undermining completely their ability to contribute to diasporic associational life and its transnational interventions at 'home'. For example, when members of ANPU London discussed at a monthly meeting the repeated absence and defaulting on dues of one of their fellow stalwarts, they attributed it to the grave difficulties into which his small retail business had fallen. Similarly, a former member of the Calabar Union traced his decision to withdraw from active involvement in the group to the drying up of the steady stream of temporary work contracts he had previously enjoyed. "I can't say I anymore have the resources to contribute fully", he explained (Interview, London, June 2005).

Significantly, with diaspora organisations generally relying on a few committed members, any decline in the socio-economic fortunes of these stalwarts can severely undermine the sustainability of diasporic associational life and its transnational contributions to 'home'. For example, an Ijesha-Yoruba 'hometown association' became inactive between the late 1990s and early 2005 because some of its most committed members had "fallen on hard times" and were "struggling even to meet the monthly dues" (President, interview, London, January 2006). Concordantly, the diaspora NGO International Aid was in 2000 forced to terminate its efforts to support healthcare at 'home' because its founder and primary funder became unable to sustain the organisation when his UK business "got in difficulties" and his two sons required support as they began courses at UK universities. Reflecting on this "very painful" experience, the founder of this diaspora NGO emphasises that his sons "had to be the priority" and reflects, "If I had the money, my philanthropy would be second to none" (Interview, London, May 2005).

### **An 'un-African' diaspora: collective transnational intervention and the problem of selfish and indulgent diasporic sons and daughters**

At 'home', there is some acceptance of the diasporic contention that life overseas is challenging in ways that constrain and undermine collective transnational benevolence. However, many at 'home' have little time for this argument. Indeed, diasporans are widely imagined to be doing rather well for themselves, their limited pursuit of organised, progressive interventions at 'home' being traced not to any socio-economic struggle endured 'abroad' but rather to the development of a more individualistic and self-centred disposition that a diasporic location is seen to facilitate and encourage.

Having participated regularly in the programmes run in and around Ipaja, Lagos by the UK-based diaspora NGO Development Impact for Nigeria (DIFN), a local church leader epitomises the attitude of many at 'home' towards their co-nationals overseas:

I think what DIFN's sponsors have done is in the minority, [...]. You find many people outside of this country, they get positions of opportunity [...] and the impact is not felt [here], rather, they become self-centred. [...] You don't find people who are out there looking back with favourable disposition towards the development of their community [...]. (Interview, Ipaja, August 2005)

As another local participant in DIFN's programmes opines:

[...T]hey go there, [...], and at the end of the day, they won't even want to spend their money on anybody. [...]. These people, they go there for their personal reasons [...]. [...]. They are not thinking of helping [the community]. [...]. All they want to do is meet their own needs, meet the needs of their family. That's all. It is just within their own little circle, they don't extend outside their circle. [...]. 'Me and my family alone', that's what they do. (Interview, Ipaja, September 2005)

Indeed, while it is often held that supporting themselves and their immediate families is rightly a priority for diasporans, there are frequent complaints that this becomes their exclusive concern at the expense of fulfilling established notions and practices of obligation and responsibility to extended kin networks and the wider community. For example, a senior figure in Ipaja's 'traditional authorities' asserts that the kingdom's "many" 'sons and daughters' based overseas "don't show interest" in the development of the community, rueing, "They only give to their close family if they so wish" (Interview, Ipaja, August 2005). The deputy head of a village in the kingdom of Ayege strikes a concordant note, railing that its five "sons and daughters" residing overseas "have done nothing to benefit the community" because "they are just interested in their own private family" (Interview, Ayege, December 2005). Similarly, a prominent figure in the associational life of Ukpenwa asserts that her co-ethnics living overseas "have [...] a selfish way of doing things" and dispense largesse "just within the immediate family" (Interview, Ukpenwa, October 2005). As another Ukpenwa notable decries, such behaviour is "not the best":

The essence of going out there should be for them to bring whatever improvement. If there's any good thing happening there, they should be able to bring it back to their people, that is the only way their people can also develop. But if your being there is just for yourself and for your immediate family, then you've done nothing to contribute back home and that is not how we should grow, that way you cannot build a nation. (Interview, Ukpenwa, November 2005)

Diasporans themselves often contend that many of their number do indeed appear to develop 'abroad' a more individualistic and self-centred disposition that runs contrary to established notions and practices of obligation to extended family and community. As the chairman of a London-based geo-ethnic organisation complains of his UK-based co-ethnics, "Most of them are only concerned about themselves" (Interview, London, May

2005). “Now that they’ve got regularised and their close family members are all OK, they don’t want to know about [the “community”] anymore”, he rails, adding indignantly, “Every community has its Judases”. Similarly, an Ayege National Progress Union (ANPU), London stalwart argues that some of her fellow UK-based Omoyeges think and act like the “bastard child” who, in a well-known Yoruba adage, forgets its obligations to the ancestral hometown (Interview, London, July 2005). Elaborating on this unfavourable comparison as part of her explanation of why it is only “just a few” UK-based Omoyeges who actively support ANPU London, she contends that some of her diasporic co-ethnics “don’t even like to share” and “don’t want to invest back home that much”. “[I]t’s just like they go after whatever it is they want”, she asserts disapprovingly.

Similarly, in accounting for the very limited progress the UK-based diaspora NGO Development Impact for Nigeria (DIFN) has made towards its aim of attracting 100 Nigerians to contribute £10 a month, a founding trustee decries that “most” of his UK-based co-nationals “don’t share [the organisation’s] values” of “social justice” and “community development” (Interview, London, July 2006). Indeed, he expresses profound disappointment that his fellow diasporans tend to extend their concern and benevolence little beyond themselves and their families:

We’re saying to them, give to DIFN to support our work, but it’s a case of their reaction, ‘what’s in it for us?’ When it comes to voluntary giving or donations, [...], Nigerian communities are not really into that, selfless giving, they’re not that much interested. [...W]e’re so obsessed with that individual attitude of ‘what’s in it for us’, [...], we’ll only give if it’s almost kind of selfish, i.e. what am I actually going to get out of this. [...T]hey will be interested in remittance, you know, sending money to their family, [...], but when it comes to development projects linked with other people’s well-being or whatever, it’s very difficult to get Nigerians to give, [...].

Back at ‘home’, the unwelcome development among diasporans of a more individualistic and self-centred disposition that undermines established notions and practices of obligation to extended family and the wider community is often traced to the heightened exposure a diasporic location is seen to give to ‘Western’ values, attitudes, and behaviours. The argument is that when living and working in ‘host’ nations beyond Africa, especially in Europe and North America, diasporans tend to be among, and can acquire the ways of, people who are seen to be, as a market woman in

Ayege put it, “too much within themselves” (Interview, Ayege, December 2005). Indeed, it is with this acquired, atomising social insularity in mind that a prominent figure in Ukpenwa bemoans that diasporans imbibe abroad “bad habits, copied from you people!” (Interview, Ukpenwa, October 2005).

Concordantly, another Ukpenwa notable decries that the “extended family system” and the “basic principles” of “neighbourliness”, “comradeship” and “community service” can be forgotten by co-ethnics based overseas by virtue of the contrasting cultural values and practices they experience in the ‘host’ environment:

[...M]any of the societies outside Africa are very different in the sense that a young man grows up and when he’s 17, it’s like a benchmark and from that point on he’s encouraged to be on his own [...]. When you go to live in a society that operates a principle of that nature, tendency can be for you to keep to yourself, [...]. So we try to encourage our people abroad not to be individualistic to that extent, [...]. (Interview, Ukpenwa, November 2005)

Exciting even more disappointment and infuriation at ‘home’, diasporans are often felt to concentrate benevolence on themselves and their immediate families not merely to meet basic needs but to make ostentatious displays of wealth. This apparent propensity to indulge in the kind of ‘conspicuous consumption’ with which migrants have been associated in much writing on mobility and development is often considered at ‘home’ to highlight the extent of the self-centred individualism diasporans acquire overseas. Furthermore, the brazen excess that diasporans stand accused of lavishing upon themselves and their immediate families is widely felt to bring into all too sharp relief the lamentable degree to which they are interested in organising and directing border-spanning benevolence to extended kin and the wider community. For example, a church youth leader in Ipaja, Lagos, argues that diasporans “are not thinking of helping [the community]”, contending, “If they come [back], they just come, shoot themselves around, ‘oh, I’m a big guy, oh, you know, I’m around’, [...]. Some of them will just come home, build a big house, and go back” (Interview, Ipaja, September 2005). Similarly, an Ipaja-based NGO worker asserts, “Those who go abroad, they come back, they build big homes, they buy flash cars for themselves and their families and that is the only thing you see” (Interview, September 2005).

Indeed, 'big' houses and 'flash' cars are widely seen to be emblematic of the individualism and self-centredness diasporans stand accused of acquiring overseas and displaying so ostentatiously at 'home'. This was made particularly clear when an imposing shiny-new Japanese-made 'sports utility vehicle' passed by on a Lagos street with a personalised registration plate emblazoned 'GEORGIA, U.S.A', prompting a local friend to chuckle in amused resignation, "That's your typical Nigerian in diaspora!" Furthermore, when we later passed a huge 'ultra-modern' two-storey house that towered incongruously above, and was grandly walled-off from, its much more modest neighbours, my friend pointed-out that it was built by a Nigerian living overseas and proclaimed indignantly that in constructing such "great villas" and "putting walls around them", diasporans display nothing but "indifference" to the conditions and development of the wider community.

Indeed, the tendency attributed to diasporans to enclose and ensconce themselves in private grandeur often attracts particular irritation and condemnation at 'home'. Typifying this, an Ipaja-based church leader observes:

While we were growing up hardly do you find any building with high rise walls and what have you, screening it from passers by. But today hardly can you pass by any street where you don't only find high walls covering the beautiful mansions or what have you inside, you find electric wires surrounding it to prevent intruders! [...]. It is not in our nature to shut ourselves away from the community like that. It's un-African! It's un-African! (Interview, Ipaja, August 2005)

Bemoaning such diasporic behaviour in Ayege, a youth leader in the kingdom reminds his co-ethnics based overseas, "It is not the big car, it is not the better house that matters but your contribution to your community" (Interview, Ayege, December 2005).

Significantly, diasporans themselves often contend that many of their number do indeed pursue self-indulgent 'conspicuous consumption' at the expense of such established notions and practices of obligation to extended kin and wider community. The chair of the Emeka Maternal Health Project is far from alone among the founders of London-based diaspora NGOs in lamenting that co-nationals in the UK tend to have much more interest in buying "flashy cars" and building "massive houses" in Nigeria than they do in supporting community-orientated initiatives at 'home' (Interview, London, May 2005). Furthermore, diasporans also identify in their ranks a propensity to direct

largesse to extravagant social events rather than 'community development'. As a founding trustee of a London-based diaspora NGO contends, "[...W]hen it comes to remittance [...], [...], the only things Nigerians seem to be funding in Nigeria are big weddings and burials" (Interview, London, July 2006).

Furthermore, diasporans often complain that some of the wealthiest of their fellow UK-based co-nationals have a propensity to lavish expenditure on extravagant social events in diaspora. Making this point, a diasporan showed me a copy of a glossy Nigerian society magazine and directed me to an article entitled "London's most lavish party". Recounting this grand event held by a prominent UK-based Nigerian, the article begun by detailing how many thousands of pounds had been spent respectively on food, drink, security and entertainment and then went on to boast, "If anyone doubted that this party was attended by anything other than big hitters then they would be left in no doubt in the car park which contained exotic Mercedes, BMWs, Porsches and Ferraris".

However, while special criticism is often reserved for the individualism and ostentatious self-indulgence that diasporans are widely seen to acquire and display, many respondents both at 'home' and 'abroad' see the development of these traits among overseas nationals in the context of a much wider, deeply entrenched, and largely internal process of social fragmentation and stark polarisation unfolding within Nigeria. Indeed, the self-centred and brazenly materialistic attitudes and behaviours that diasporans stand accused of acquiring overseas are widely seen to have been proliferating within Nigeria for many years. Consequently, a breakdown in systems of obligation to extended family and community and a concomitant rise in self-indulgent 'conspicuous consumption' among apparently wealthy elites are regularly viewed as general, rather than diaspora-specific or diaspora-driven, socio-cultural trends.

For example, while admonishing diasporans for "becom[ing] self-centred", a Lagos-based church leader argues that more individualistic attitudes and behaviours have been taking hold not only among his co-nationals based 'overseas' but also among those based at 'home' (Interview, Ipaja, August 2005). Consequently, he decries that in becoming increasingly neglectful of obligations to wider kin and community, diasporans are merely reflecting what is an all too well established trend in Nigeria:

[...T]he cultural upbringing of an average Nigerian family is communal-based but somehow along the line, it's been seriously damaged, everybody seems to now be on his own. In fact, the extended family culture has been broken now. Gradually you are now beginning to have a Nigerian family man who is only interested in himself, the wife and maybe children, it has never been like that before. We have always believed in this extended family programme and, because it is broken, gradually nobody is interested in the community.

Concordantly, in accounting for why his fellow diasporans tend not to share his organisation's ideals of "social justice" and "community development", a founding trustee of the UK-based diaspora NGO DIFN contends:

Well, it reflects the society we have come from. It's not just here that most Nigerians don't share those values, it's in Nigeria too. For me, that's why the country has still got lots of political, social issues, conflicts, because we're too, very individualistic, we're not a society, [...]. People are so obsessed with who they are, [...], that's all they're concerned about, they're not concerned about their fellow human being and how they might not have three square meals a day or how he's going to get that treatment for that HIV. (Interview, London, July 2006)

For this DIFN trustee as for so many other respondents, the self-centred individualism that many diasporans appear to imbibe from 'home' is the product of an entrenched and pervasive process of social fragmentation in Nigeria:

[...Y]ears ago, Nigeria was not like that, we were a community, people fend for each other, people cared for their next door neighbour. It's not always been like this [...], even as recently as 30 years ago, we were a society, [...]. Back in the 60s, the local communities were strong, if you wanted to build a school, the local community would go round and get the bricks. People would support each other and leave their doors open and look out for each other's kids, [...], and that's how people grew up to become caring-focussed. But those values are lost in our current society, we don't have that anymore, it's more individualistic, people are just looking after themselves.

Respondents at 'home' very often trace this apparent contraction in the scope of moral concern and benevolence in Nigeria primarily to the exigencies of economic crisis. The local founder of an NGO in Ipaja, which provides support for what she contends is an increasing number of elderly people who are no longer cared for by their families, explains:



You know, the economic crunch has even crumpled the whole of the extended family system. The youth nowadays find it difficult to even accommodate extended family. You know when your mother-in-law comes, or your father-in-law comes, and you haven't got enough *gari* to even eat yourself then you now want to feed another mouth?! [...]. So it's not working [...], it has disintegrated. (Interview, Ipaja, August 2005)

Furthermore, respondents at 'home' often contend that as economic hardship compels Nigerians to behave in a way that appears more self-centred, it is not only the 'extended family system' that is undermined but also notions and practices of concern and benevolence to the wider community. For example, the 'traditional authorities' in Ayege lament that it has become increasingly difficult to attract communal development funds from 'citizens' because of a seemingly unrelenting decline in the mainstay of the kingdom's economy. As the General Secretary of the Ayege Progress Committee bemoans, "People cry that there is no money in town, that the cocoa business is not good" (Interview, Ayege, November 2005). Concurring, a stalwart of the Ayege National Progress Union, London asserts, "That sense of communal effort died down as the economic condition went down" (Interview, London, July 2005). Similarly, in arguing that "the spirit of giving has been lost", a local NGO worker in Ipaja points to the "poverty level": "Imagine somebody who has not eaten, who cannot afford three square meals, asking them to bring one or two Naira, they find it difficult to part with money. It's because of the bad economy. That's the problem" (Interview, Ipaja, December 2005).

Undermining further established systems of obligation to extended family and wider community in Nigeria, the atomising effects of economic hardship are widely seen to be compounded by the emergence of a self-indulgent, ostentatious and often dishonest 'get rich quick mentality' inspired by the excesses of a corrupt political elite. Pointing to the bad example set by local government officials who fail to "put community before self" and "build expensive houses on ill-gotten wealth" (APC newsletter, 2003), the General Secretary of the Ayege Progress Committee argues that many of his moneyed co-ethnics "waste their resources on luxuries" and need to "wake up" to the development needs of the kingdom (APC newsletter, 1999). Concordantly, a local NGO worker based in Lagos decries, "the average Nigerian loves money too much, he just wants to spend it on himself and show people that he is doing well and enjoying life" (Interview, Ipaja,

October 2005). “But what do we expect when we have leaders going to Europe and spending our money on cosmetic surgery and big houses”, he adds, making reference to a state governor who had recently been arrested in London on corruption and money laundering charges. As a founding trustee of a UK-based diaspora NGO contends of Nigeria’s leaders, “[...W]ith all their squandering of the nation’s wealth, the only thing they have encouraged is for people to be more materialistic, to chase the dollar, chase money” (Interview, London, July 2006).

## **Conclusion**

Whatever it is seen to derive from, it is clear that a more individualistic and self-indulgent disposition is posited both at ‘home’ and ‘abroad’ as a key reason why many diasporans appear to have limited interest in joining and contributing to diaspora organisations and their transnational visions of progress. This suggests that diasporic desires to come together for the benefit of ‘home’ might not be as strong as often appears to be assumed in celebratory discourses of diaspora and development. However, it is also clear that what can appear as diasporic individualism and self-indulgence is intimately related to direct and indirect experiences of hardship at ‘home’ and ‘abroad’. Having often seen and/or faced difficult times at ‘home’ and while attempting to settle and progress in diaspora, there is a strong sense that many diasporic Nigerians are especially anxious to prioritise and ensure their own well-being and that of their immediate family, and enjoy any ‘comfort’ that they achieve in so doing.

Moreover, it would seem that many diasporans are simply not in a position to initiate and support collective transnational intervention, no matter how much they may aspire to do so. Indeed, we have seen that the challenges of obtaining legal settlement, overcoming discrimination and racism and, relatedly, securing well-paid work with sociable hours, mean that many diasporans have neither the time nor the money to actively participate in, or contribute to, diasporic associational life. Therefore, governments and international agencies that attempt to engage and support collective transnational intervention by, for example, offering matching development funds should not divert attention and resources away from what this research suggests are still incredibly pressing issues of migrant integration and ‘minority’ inclusion. There may well be as much, if not more, potential for the development of ‘home’ in advancing policies that pursue with renewed vigour a ‘host’ society that facilitates the socio-

economic progress of diasporic populations and thereby enables many more diasporans to participate in diasporic associational life and support collective transnational intervention should they so wish.

## **9. Constraining collective transnational power II: the problem of transnational trust and the difficulties of doing development at ‘home’**

### **Introduction**

In Chapter 8 it was asserted that diasporic mobilisation for the benefit of ‘home’ is seen to be severely constrained by the challenges of developing in diaspora and the emergence of a more individualistic and self-indulgent diasporic disposition. Building on this argument, the present chapter contends that these constraints on collective diasporic benevolence are compounded significantly by a distinct lack of transnational trust, the practical difficulties of operating transnationally and the challenges of intervening in a ‘home’ environment that is often more hostile than enabling.

Exploring first the problem of transnational trust, this chapter traces how a pervasive and deeply entrenched culture of mistrust appears to exist both within the diaspora and between the diaspora and ‘home’. With corruption, fraud and clientalism seen to be rife in Nigerian society, there is a prevailing suspicion among diasporans that the organisations formed by their fellow overseas nationals are little more than vehicles for the personal enrichment and political gain of those who form and run them, strongly discouraging many diasporans from joining and supporting these groups. Furthermore, when it comes to making collective transnational contributions, organised diasporans are generally extremely wary of trusting ‘home’-based individuals and institutions to act as local intermediaries, fearing that they will misappropriate any benevolence that is channelled through them. Consequently, many diaspora organisations often decide not to work through local intermediaries, severely constraining their ability to intervene at ‘home’. And where diaspora organisations do engage local intermediaries, a lack of trust often limits the nature and extent of the relationship and the transnational contributions that can be made through it.

This chapter then goes on to detail how these problems of transnational trust and operation are compounded by, and indeed often linked to, the lack of an ‘enabling environment’ at ‘home’. The border-spanning flows of people, information, money and materials that are so vital to collective transnational intervention are seen to be severely

deterred and disrupted by highly unreliable communication and transport infrastructures and a major lack of security in Nigeria. The transfer 'home' of diasporic professional expertise is seen to be especially constrained by woefully inadequate technical facilities and a deeply entrenched culture of corruption and unprofessionalism. Furthermore, the Nigerian state is widely considered to be too unreliable and ineffective to be an enabling partner of collective transnational intervention and is even often viewed as actively hostile to modes of diasporic engagement that might question its policies and authority. Significantly, this is regarded as indicative of how individuals, institutions and communities at 'home' are often unreceptive and even resistant to collective transnational intervention.

Overall, then, this chapter makes clear that collective transnational intervention can face more constraints and challenges than is generally assumed in celebratory discourses of diaspora and development, which tend to emphasise the ease and strength of transnational affinities, flows, and connections in this apparently global age. While transnational ties and networks are often seen to be readily facilitated by advanced transport and telecommunications technology and embedded firmly in supposedly strong solidarities such as family, kin, ethnicity and nationality, it would appear that these connections can be rather cumbersome, weak and prone to fracture. It becomes clear through the chapter that this is due in no small part to the lack of an 'enabling environment' at 'home'. Consequently, it is argued that some notable progress needs to be made in overcoming the development challenges of 'home' before the organised diaspora can begin to make a notable contribution to the progress of 'home'.

### **“We Nigerians are afraid of each other”: collective transnational intervention and the problem of transnational trust**

#### ***Discouraging diasporic mobilisation: organisational operation, internal tensions and a lack of trust in diaspora***

Alongside the difficulties of developing in diaspora and the emergence of a culture of individualism and self-centredness, the very ways in which many diaspora organisations operate are often also seen to limit the degree of participation and support such groups are able to attract. Indeed, diaspora organisations are often considered to discourage active involvement by devoting too much of their meeting time to administrative

formality, excessive deliberation, trivial debate and idle ‘gossip’. As a stalwart of the Calabar Union contends, “Some people don’t like coming to the meetings because there is a lot of talk!” (Interview, London, May 2005). Most notably, this mode of operation is widely seen to be especially unappealing to younger, more ‘dynamic’ diasporans, particularly when it is coupled to gerontocratic principles that offer them few opportunities to participate fully.

In addition to deterring participation and support from diasporans in general and younger, more dynamic diasporans in particular, the rather tedious and inefficient way in which many diaspora organisations are seen to conduct their business is widely considered to ferment potentially debilitating internal tensions and splits. Indeed, the nature of organisational operation often becomes a key point of contention in what can escalate from rather jocular discussions into fractious disputes along the lines of generation (see also Oyètádé 1993). In the case of the Ayege National Progress Union (ANPU), London, for instance, an active member contends that debates about the conduct of associational affairs are central to a usually benign but sometimes crippling contest between his fellow “business-minded” “modernisers” and the generally older “traditionalists” (Interview, London, June 2005). This generational antagonism is generally seen to do little more than “slow down” (ibid) associational decision-making even further but in 2000 it became so intense and debilitating that most members were compelled to leave, causing the association to cease functioning for four years. While the association was ‘resurrected’ in early 2004, about eight of the ‘traditionalist’ faction refused to rejoin and instead formed their own separate union. Significantly, the existence of two rival unions means that many former and potential members have not become active in either group because they do not want to ‘take sides’ in what is often seen as an unnecessarily adversarial political situation.

In accounting for this debilitating split, ANPU London stalwarts highlight how generational antagonisms were inflamed and exploited by a relatively new member who mobilised an ‘elders’ faction against the association’s middle-aged, and therefore relatively young, president. The divisive member stands accused of undermining the incumbent president in order to win the support of the ‘elders’ in a self-interested quest for power both within the union and in electoral politics back at ‘home’. Indeed, personal interests and ambitions are widely seen to spark the damaging internal tensions and splits to which diaspora organisations in general are often considered prone. The

apparent pursuit of self-interest and personal ambition is generally considered to be particularly divisive in diasporic associational life because it readily fuels fears and suspicions that organisations are being ‘hijacked’ for individual ends that run contrary to, and potentially undermine, collective aims and objectives.

Significantly, such fears and suspicions point to a fundamental issue that is widely and consistently seen not only to hinder the internal operation of diaspora organisations but also to deter many diasporans from joining and supporting these groups; a pervasive and deeply entrenched lack of trust between Nigerians both in diaspora and at ‘home’. Pointing to the nepotism, clientalism and corruption that are seen to be so prevalent at ‘home’, diasporans are often very wary of getting involved with their co-nationals in diaspora organisations because they suspect that those who form and run such groups do so for little other than personal and often improper gain. Indeed, what often appears to verge on a culture of mistrust is a major factor discouraging diasporans from coming together and contributing collectively to ‘home’.

For example, reflecting the scepticism with which professional associations are regarded in Nigeria, their diasporic counterparts are widely dismissed as networks through which individuals seek personal access to power and resources in the Nigerian state. Dr Daramola, for instance, was “hesitant” about participating in the Engineering Forum of Nigerians (EFN) because he suspected that it might represent a “duplication” of the “nepotism” with which professional bodies are widely associated in Nigeria (Interview, London, July 2006). Indeed, despite having been made aware of EFN soon after its inauguration in 2002, he only joined in 2006 when a fellow UK-based Nigerian engineer who he regards as his academic and professional “mentor” vouched for, and introduced him to, the organisation. However, he believes that concerns such as those he had initially about EFN are the primary factor discouraging UK-based Nigerian engineers from participating in and supporting the association:

[They are] scared of getting involved, [...]. I think the fear of most other engineers is that, ‘Look, I don’t want to, we’ve always heard stories of people coming together and you find out that the so-called core executives are only doing it for their own selfish interest, just to get connected to influential people back home [...] and then take contract’.

Such concerns are especially strong and prevalent towards umbrella associations attempting to represent the UK-based Nigerian diaspora as a whole. The leaders of such organisations are often suspected of employing the political capital of claiming to speak for the Nigerian ‘community’ in the UK to interact with, and seek favour from, representatives of the Nigerian state. This is especially true in the case of Nigerians in Diaspora Organisation (NIDO), which is often seen as a ‘political’ organisation led by diasporans who are primarily concerned with seeking ‘position’ and ‘contract’ back at ‘home’. Indeed, NIDO and its leaders are the subject of particular suspicion because the organisation was established and initially funded by the Federal Government with a primary aim of linking diasporic professionals with openings in Nigeria. Furthermore, some diasporans even suggest that NIDO is little more than an overseas branch of the ruling People’s Democratic Party, affording the diaspora organisation’s leaders privileged access not only to professional opportunities but also political positions back at ‘home’.

Even greater than the suspicion that leaders of diaspora organisations take advantage of their positions to seek advantage in accessing power and resources at ‘home’ is the concern that they primarily seek direct and dishonest personal financial gain. This reflects widespread wariness of corruption and fraud, popularly known as ‘419’ in reference to the Nigerian legislative code created to tackle the ‘advanced-fee’ money-making scams with which Nigerians have come to be associated around the world. For example, in accounting for why it can be difficult to attract members, an executive of a diasporic professional association bemoans that his fellow diasporans “are suspicious of anyone setting up any sort of organisation”, fearing that “it’s just a money-making scheme” and that the founders will “disappear with the money” (Interview, London, July 2005). Indeed, the master of ceremonies at the Ukpenwa Women’s Association UK (UWA) fundraising cultural event in 2006 acknowledged that its is a “cliché” that associations like the UWA raise money for what they claim is “a good cause” only for it to be “not used as promised”. The UWA was different, he claimed, calling on me, as someone who had “visited Ukpenwa and seen what the Ukpenwa Women have done”, to address the audience and “vouch” for the association and its work.

Especially strong suspicions of corruption and fraud are aroused by diaspora organisations taking the form of NGOs. This reflects how, in Nigeria, NGOs are almost synonymous with ‘419’ and their founders are almost instinctively suspected of seeking



only their own personal gain. This profoundly sceptical attitude emerged and became entrenched during late 1980s and the 1990s as the proliferation of NGOs in Nigeria soon became popularly associated with the advancement of personalised political agendas and, most especially, the misappropriation of state and international donor funding. As this trend for forming NGOs has been reproduced in diaspora, so too has the deep and particular suspicion associated with it. Indeed, when I mentioned diaspora NGOs to one diasporic respondent, he exclaimed, “There’s a major source of fraud; lots of NGOs are set up by people just as a way to make money!” (Interview, Abuja, July 2005). Insisting that I had to “be careful” when dealing with such organisations, he gave an account, very much like those given by numerous other respondents, of a fellow Nigerian who established an “NGO with no office” and used the money it raised to buy himself a Mercedes and a big house.

Such prevailing and particular mistrust of diaspora organisations taking the form of NGOs, especially the idea that they represent ‘money-making scams’, is a key reason why they struggle to win the support of diasporans. As Mr Yomi Oloko, the founder of Development Impact For Nigeria, bemoans in accounting for why his diaspora NGO has made such little progress in meeting its target of attracting 100 UK-based Nigerians to donate £10 a month, “It’s difficult for several reasons, what you’ll find is that some Nigerians are wondering whether we are just 419, that we want to cut money” (Interview, London, July 2005). Yomi is far from alone in explicitly tracing such suspicions to a fundamental lack of trust between Nigerians in diaspora, a culture of mistrust he, like others, traces back to Nigeria itself. As Yomi reflects in an interview he gave to a newspaper in Nigeria, “[...W]e Nigerians are afraid of each other. We’re afraid that we’ll dupe one another. We’re afraid that we’ll steal each other’s money [...] and that’s part of our culture” (Oikelome, 2004). Indeed, the experiences of some of my respondents suggest that Yomi might be right to argue that “a lot” of diasporans “have been 419ed” and are therefore “so wary” of donating to organisations like DIFN (Interview, London, July 2006). “We just have to learn how to trust”, implores Yomi (Oikelome, 2004).

*Discouraging and disrupting collective transnational intervention: the problem of trust between diaspora and 'home'*

Diasporans are generally very wary of joining and supporting diaspora organisations not only because they tend to be suspicious of those who run them but also because they often have an even greater mistrust of the 'home'-based intermediaries through which some of these organisations direct their transnational interventions. As one diasporan contends of the collective remittances made by "town union[s]", "The Oba will spend the money on his own people [i.e. family]. The money is to the Oba, it's not to the masses. That is just a problem. That is one of the reasons why I don't join these things..." (Interview, Lagos, October 2005). Indeed, what verges on a culture of mistrust prevails not only within the diaspora but also between the diaspora and 'home'. This was especially apparent at a fundraising event when the founder of a London-based diaspora NGO that works to assist an orphanage in Nigeria was asked by a fellow diasporan, "Who do you send the money to?" Appearing to instinctively understand the implicit suspicion in the question, the founder replied, "Oh, don't worry, they're Italian nuns. They're not Nigerians!" "That's OK", the concerned diasporan exclaimed in response, "as long as they're not Nigerians!" While the diasporan was still not sufficiently reassured to donate or sign-up to support the NGO, the implication was that she would have been even less likely to do so had its local agents been fellow Nigerians. Indeed, the director of another diaspora NGO laments that it is "a tough job" to convince diasporans that any money they might donate will be "used properly" once it is sent to Nigeria (Interview, London, June 2005). "They just don't trust the place", he bemoans.

A seemingly profound mistrust of 'home'-based intermediaries clearly appears to deter diasporans from joining and supporting diaspora organisations and their transnational visions. Furthermore, this problem of transnational trust is also one of the most severe constraints on the nature and extent of the transnational contributions diaspora organisations are themselves willing and able to make. Leaders and committed members of diaspora organisations generally agree that the most effective way of executing collective interventions at 'home' is to have a local intermediary to implement and oversee projects 'on the ground'. However, many diaspora organisations simply do not trust any individuals or institutions at 'home' to take on this role. As the president of an Igbo state union contends, "You can't send money to anyone there, not even your own

father, they will just use it for themselves” (Interview, London, May 2005). Concordantly, the director of a diaspora NGO asserts, “You can’t just send the money [...], whoever you send it to will just embezzle it!” (Interview, London, May 2005).

In the common situation where diaspora organisations decide not to trust and engage a local intermediary, they tend to look to members to implement projects during visits ‘home’. However, this mode of cross-border operation is widely seen to have limited capacity for making efficient, effective and sustained collective transnational interventions. Sending a member or members ‘home’ to implement a project is generally considered an expensive way of operating transnationally. Indeed, some organisations simply cannot afford to do so and, being unwilling to trust local intermediaries, find it ultimately impossible to make any interventions at ‘home’. Where diaspora organisations can afford to send members ‘home’, or are able to call on the voluntary services of members making personal trips ‘home’, the generally ad hoc, infrequent, and short-term nature of such visits means that the implementation of projects is piecemeal and long-drawn out, sometimes putting their successful completion in doubt.

This is exemplified in the case of the NGO Mrs Chukwu founded in 1992 with the as yet unfulfilled aim of constructing a maternity hospital in her ancestral village. Refusing to trust any local intermediaries to receive and deploy money after a bitter experience early on in the project, Mrs Chukwu insists on expending funds and managing construction directly during visits ‘home’. However, Mrs Chukwu complains that her inability to visit ‘home’ more than once every two years, and generally for little more than two weeks at a time, is a major factor retarding the construction of the hospital, conspiring with a general paucity of funds to make the project’s completion a much more distant prospect than she had ever envisaged. Indeed, it is a source of huge frustration for Mrs Chukwu that in over a decade of deeply committed but necessarily incremental effort, the construction of the hospital has progressed only as far as its outer walls rising just few feet above the ground.

Unwilling to trust local intermediaries and recognising the limits of relying on members to implement projects during visits ‘home’, many diaspora organisations decide that even if they had the necessary funds, major interventions requiring substantial and sustained investments of time and resources, such as constructing public infrastructure,

are simply beyond their logistical capabilities. If such organisations still resolve to try and make at least some attempt to contribute to 'home', they tend to pursue more modest and manageable interventions that are not only commensurate with their generally limited financial resources but which also lend themselves to being initiated and completed by a member or members within the time-frame of a visit. However, the concern is that such interventions have an impact as sporadic and fleeting as the visit itself. For example, a town union member doubts whether the HIV/AIDS awareness campaign his association conducted in the ancestral community in 2003 had much of an effect beyond the short period during which it was implemented by two visiting members (Interview, London, July 2006). Indeed, when this member made his own visit 'home' later that year, he was dismayed to find that the leaflets, posters, and banners that had been distributed around the community had already disappeared.

As a prominent figure in UK-based Nigerian associational life contends, when diaspora organisations "don't have anyone to trust" at 'home' and have to "send people over", they simply "can't do sustained projects" and have little choice but to content themselves with making interventions that are "ah hoc", "one-off" and "contained" (Interview, London, June 2006). Furthermore, it could be argued that this apparently rather compromised and unsatisfactory mode of transnational operation limits not only the direct impact of collective diasporic intervention but also its potential for producing more indirect effects such as the transfer 'home' of supposedly new and developmentally-beneficial ideas, values, and practices. Given that diaspora organisations rarely trust 'home'-based actors sufficiently to engage and empower them as local intermediaries of transnational intervention, it is not surprising that there is limited evidence of such groups transmitting 'social remittances' to individuals and institutions in Nigeria. Indeed, where diaspora organisations choose not to trust and work through local actors in any meaningful way, it is difficult to imagine how they could transmit and instil virtuous notions and behaviours, such as budget and project management skills, as expected in celebratory discourses of diaspora and development.

Even in cases where diaspora organisations do engage local intermediaries in making interventions at 'home', mistrust still tends to constrain significantly the form and strength of the transnational relationship they are willing to forge. Indeed, a lingering, and sometimes rather deep, suspicion of the local intermediary often prompts diaspora organisations to limit how and to what degree they choose to collaborate with these

'home'-based actors, circumscribing the nature and extent of the transnational interventions they are willing and able to undertake with and through them. For example, the UK-branch of the Ilu Development Union (IDU UK) chooses not to make financial contributions to its 'home'-based 'parent' body because it fears the funds would not be spent "as intended" and may even be "siphoned off" (President, interview, London, May 2005). In an attempt to ensure that its contributions to the communal development efforts coordinated by its 'home'-branch produce a desired and tangible outcome, IDU UK instead confines itself to making donations of "equipment", such as the water pump and power generator it has so far sent to the local hospital.

With IDU UK not trusting its 'parent'-body sufficiently to send it the funds to purchase the desired equipment locally, the association has to incur the relative expense of procuring the equipment in the UK and then shipping it to Nigeria. While the association believes that so doing increases the chances of its contributions being made in the intended form, it bemoans that this mode of transnational operation born of mistrust more readily depletes its very limited financial resources and diminishes the scale and regularity of the material donations it can afford to make. Furthermore, IDU UK even doubts whether its 'home'-branch can be trusted to oversee donated equipment, fearing that once it is placed in the care of the 'parent'-body, "it might not be used properly". The association therefore insists that its material donations are presented publicly at the annual Ilu Day celebration, the logic being that the wider community is made aware of the contributions and will take an interest in monitoring how they are distributed and employed.

Indeed, the rather tentative, measured and ultimately fragile relationship geo-ethnic diaspora organisations tend to maintain with their 'home'-based parent bodies is indicative of the way in which mistrust often constrains and even completely undermines collective transnational cooperation. Within the Ayege National Progress Union (ANPU), London, for example, the extent to which it should engage and support the Ayege Progress Committee (APC) is a well-worn point of debate with some members urging that the association should refrain as much as possible from working through, and contributing to, the 'home'-based 'apex' organisation and its communal 'self-help' initiatives. As an ANPU London stalwart contends, "Sometimes not all members agree on what should be sponsored. For example, people will say, 'During Ayege Day we should donate as much money as possible', and some will go, 'No! All

this money, let's put it together and [...] have our own projects [...]" (Interview, London, July 2005).

Significantly, calls to bypass the APC are generally born out of "reservations"<sup>1</sup> about the 'apex'-organisation and the way in which it operates. The principal source of this mistrust is the APC's record of failing to implement projects in accordance with ANPU London's wishes and expectations. For many ANPU London members, like many Omoyeges both in diaspora and at 'home', the crux of their disappointment with the APC is that even after more than 20 years of fundraising and construction, the 'apex' organisation is yet to complete its 'headline' town hall project. In addition to the "dragging"<sup>2</sup> progress made with the town hall, ANPU London members also point to two instances in the Union's more direct interactions with the APC that have further undermined their faith in the 'parent' body. Firstly, when ANPU London resolved in 1993 to provide some scholarships to secondary school students at 'home', the APC insisted that the earmarked money be added to its existing scholarship fund and then proceeded to defy the wishes of the Union by dispensing awards tenable only for a year at a time rather than for the entire duration of recipients' secondary school careers. Secondly, when a few years later ANPU London responded to an APC appeal for funds to construct "security gates" at the six main entrances to Ayege town, the Union was "so disappointed" to find that instead of the "high gate[s], proper gate[s]" it was expecting, the APC had installed merely "little bar[s]" (ANPU member, interview, London, July 2005). These two particular incidents not only left a good number of ANPU London members "annoyed" but also prompted some to ask, "Why do we have to be doing our things through [the APC] because anything we ask them to do, they always do it their own way rather than the way we want it done?" (ibid).

While some members openly doubt whether the APC can be trusted to faithfully implement projects on behalf of the association, ANPU London feels it has little choice but to continue to work through the 'parent' body given that it has even less faith in any alternative local intermediaries who might potentially be engaged. In common with the vast majority of organised diasporans involved in this study, ANPU London members tend to dismiss out of hand the idea of executing projects through local government; like all tiers of the Nigerian state, local government is widely regarded as a byword for gross

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<sup>1</sup> ANPU London member, interview, London, June 2005.

<sup>2</sup> ANPU London member, interview, London, April 2005.

misadministration and corruption and is generally expected to do little more than simply 'chop' all funds with which it might be entrusted. Furthermore, as local governments often administer more than one geo-ethnic community, they are not trusted by ethnicised unions such as ANPU London to deploy collective transnational munificence to the particular benefit of the ancestral homeland.

ANPU London has also joined many other diaspora organisations in dismissing the possibility of trusting individuals at 'home' to act as local intermediaries. As ANPU London stalwart Mr Akinmade contends, "[...W]here are individuals that are ready to do it or to assist there? The trust is not there" (Interview, London, July 2005). And again like many other diaspora organisations, ANPU London has also deemed it impractical for members to implement projects during visits home. As Mr Akinmade notes, "[...T]o do it without [the APC] would require [members] going on a regular basis, if not even on a monthly basis, which we can't do".

Indeed, it is having ruled-out both this mode of transnational operation and the possibility of putting any trust in alternative local intermediaries that ANPU London finds itself with little choice but to continue to work through the APC despite the often serious doubts members have about the 'apex' body. As Mr Akinmade asserts with unenthusiastic pragmatism:

[...A] few of us that go home on a regular basis realised the logistics problem there and [that] we can't do anything behind [the APC], or without involving them [...]. [...T]hey are the only recognised body. [...]. So that's how, at the end, that's how we finally decided that, well, everything will have to go through them.

There is, then, a strong sense of resignation about ANPU London's decision to maintain a collaboration with the APC; the 'apex' body can at times appear to be seen as little more than the default option, chosen not so much because it is entirely trusted but more because it is the least mistrusted. Consequently, it is unsurprising that doubts about the APC remain, and often resurface, within ANPU London, fuelling continuing debates about how and what extent the union should support and engage its 'parent' organisation. Indeed, when the formal business at the March 2006 meeting of the association turned to how best to respond to the Oba's recent request for contributions to the APC's latest 'headline' 'self-help' venture, the establishment of Ayege's very own polytechnic, familiar concerns about whether the 'apex' body could be trusted to

implement a project “properly” were again rehearsed. Of particular concern was how the APC might handle financial contributions to the project given how its deployment of funds had severely disappointed ANPU London members in the past. Was it sensible to donate money in light of this often unsatisfactory track-record, especially when the APC had provided neither a formal proposal nor a budget for the project? Might it not be advisable to donate equipment instead? Even the member who spoke most passionately in favour of responding to the request for funds as promptly and generously as possible acknowledged that the Union had seen previous donations to the ‘apex’ body “wasted”.

Such concerns about the extent to which the APC can be trusted “to do things properly”, particularly in relation to money, are often linked, like so much diasporic mistrust of ‘home’, to a deep and almost instinctive suspicion of ‘419’, that ensemble of financial impropriety, corruption, and fraud popularly seen to be rife in Nigeria. As an active ANPU London member laments, not all diasporic Omoyeges agree with her that the parent body is “very honest” and “accountable” and some even “say ‘oh, APC, they embezzle money, all the chiefs are spending the money on themselves’” (Interview, London, July 2005). Indeed, as its officials and newsletters make clear, the APC itself is only too well aware that many diasporic Omoyeges have serious doubts, and often grave suspicions, about the ‘apex’ organisation and how it administers the development of the Kingdom. As the General Secretary of the APC bemoans:

Our people abroad, [...], some will just come home and think ‘[...], all the money we have been contributing, is this how far [the APC] can go on the construction of the [town] hall? Wasn’t it supposed to be complete within 10 years or 5 years?’ That is the complaint. And people will not come here [to the APC Secretariat] to ask the questions, they will be talking in the bar, ‘ah, they have chopped all the money, [...], everything is gone!’[laughs]. (Interview, Ayege, November 2005)

Significantly, the APC General Secretary decries that such doubts about the probity of the APC cause Omoyege organisations based overseas to limit, and even terminate, their collective transnational benevolence. Recalling when a representative of a Europe-based Omoyege union visited him at the APC Secretariat in the contentiously incomplete town hall in 2000, the APC General Secretary laments:



[...H]e came down and he went round the whole hall [and said], 'Is this how far they have been able to go with the hall? I will not put down my kobo<sup>3</sup>!' [laughs]. We have somebody coming right from [Europe] even instead of encouraging the people there to pay he came down and even told us that he cannot subscribe his own kobo!

Indeed, it appears that this representative of an overseas Omoyege union may well have discouraged his fellow members from continuing their collective support to the APC and its communal 'self-help' initiatives; the association concerned is not recorded as having made any Ayege Day donations since 2001.

The widespread doubts and suspicions about the financial probity of the APC mean the 'apex' organisation also struggles to win the support of Omoyege individuals and associations at 'home'. Indeed, the APC General Secretary admits that the organisation enjoys only "about 50% confidence" among the kingdom's citizens (ibid). Furthermore, he complains that he all too often overhears people in Ayege claiming that the APC has "chopped" or "eaten" all the funds entrusted to it by the community. In the face of such popular suspicions, the APC frequently comes close to having to cancel its annual Ayege Day fundraising celebration, which in the event attracts donations from a "very low" percentage of the community both at 'home' and 'abroad' (APC document, 2002). Indeed, it seems that fears of financial impropriety have the potential to undermine communal fundraising efforts completely; the APC General Secretary claims that another kingdom near Ayege has failed to hold its annual 'community day' "for almost ten years [...] because the people complained that the money they donated was chopped [...] and they don't want it to happen again".

***"We are in a separate world entirely": the problem of trust between diaspora and 'home' and the challenge of transnational communication***

While doubts and suspicions about the financial probity of the APC are prevalent at 'home', it is in diaspora, and especially in the overseas diaspora, that they are often seen to be especially pervasive. This is traced primarily to the "communication gap" the 'apex' body has with its 'citizens' and their associations (APC document, 2004); a gap that is seen to be particularly wide with those based in diaspora, especially those located overseas. Even though the APC has since 1999 produced once or twice a year a

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<sup>3</sup> A Nigerian monetary unit equal to one hundredth of a naira.

newsletter 'summary' of its income, expenditure, and activities in an attempt to close this gap and dampen suspicions of financial impropriety, it has had difficulties ensuring that these publications and their reassuring message circulate among Omoyeges based 'abroad', especially overseas. As the APC General Secretary bemoans, "Our people abroad, although we send this thing to them, some of them don't see it, some will still think 'all the money has been chopped'" (Interview, Ayege, November 2005).

Indeed, facing a highly unreliable postal system, the absence of an internet connection and extremely limited telephone access (Ayege's connection to the national landline network has not functioned for years and the relatively isolated kingdom has barely any mobile reception having no GSM mast of its own), the APC General Secretary rues, "We don't have means to communicate with our people ['abroad'], we are in a separate world entirely". Furthermore, even if the APC did have direct telephone and/or internet access, it would seem unlikely to make much use of these technologies, its senior executives apparently having a strong preference for official printed letters and documents which they see as appropriately formal for the important business of communal development and as less prone to being corrupted in transmission. Similarly, 'traditionalists' in ANPU London have also suggested that telephone and email represent means of communication that would be far too informal and potentially corruptible for the job of engaging with the affairs of the kingdom and its most esteemed leaders.

Consequently, the APC's only real option is to rely on a small cadre of loyal transnationals who travel relatively frequently between 'home' and 'abroad' to 'carry' its newsletters and other published communiqués to the diaspora. However, there is a limit to how widely and effectively the APC's modest band of messengers is able to pass on the 'apex' body's formal, printed words to others in the diaspora. This is especially so in the case of the overseas diaspora, with which the flow of envoys to and from the 'home'-based 'parent'-body is seen to be even less regular and intense than it is with the more proximate diaspora within Nigeria. Indeed, when the APC called Omoyege associations to what was intended to be a major summit in Ayege in 2004, it appears the formal invitation did not travel far with a "communication gap" being highlighted as a major factor in the poor attendance that was achieved, particularly from INU branches 'abroad' and especially from those based overseas (APC document, 2004). Many of the major ANPU branches within Nigeria, such as Lagos, Ibadan, and

Abuja, were absent and none of the ANPU branches based overseas attended. Addressing the relatively few, overwhelmingly 'home'-based Omoyege organisations that did attend the APC summit, the Oba unsurprisingly bemoaned that the organised Omoyege diaspora is "out of touch" with its 'home' base (ibid).

ANPU London has certainly experienced significant 'communication gaps' with the APC. In one particularly notable incident, ANPU London missed the opportunity to be a 'host organisation' at Ayege Day 1997 as the APC's invitation to assume this highly honoured position was not delivered in time. Furthermore, it appears that ANPU London members do not receive, and are not even aware of, the newsletter the APC publishes once or twice a year and attempts to circulate throughout the extended Omoyege community in the hope of winning from it greater levels of trust and benevolence. Indeed, Union members often express deep frustration about the difficulties of communicating with the 'home'-based 'parent'-body. As one of their number decries:

[...O]ne problem we normally have with APC is communication. [...T]he logistic problem is enormous, [...]. You can post a letter from Ayege, you will be lucky if it gets here, you know, and if it's going to get here, it might take months, [...]. [...S]o the encouragement is not there for [the APC] to write any letter because they will say "What's the point?" [...I]f they now see that the letter might not even get to the destination, then they don't bother. And that's how the whole thing died down and we get frustrated here. (Interview, London, July 2005)

Consequently, this ANPU London stalwart argues that members who take the time to call in at the APC Secretariat during visits 'home' become vital to having any meaningful communication with the 'apex' body:

[The APC] only talk to you when they see you. [...]. At the end of the day, when you go there and you see them and you talk to them, they explain their own situation, you then understand. But only few of us do.

Indeed, another active member, Mr Oluwole, bemoans that the practice of depending heavily on a few visiting members to facilitate exchanges of information and benevolence with the APC is highly unsatisfactory, undermining both the vitality of the association and its ability to contribute to the ancestral community:

[...] that's hindering the amount of, and rate of, getting money sent over because first of all there's an issue of finding somebody who's going, there's an issue of working out what's going on, [...], who it's going to get to, and how long it's going to take. And these issues just drag and drag and it really makes it very inefficient and it's actually stifling the Union, [and] I see how it stifles the hometown as well. (Interview, London, June 2005)

Furthermore, while Mr Oluwole acknowledges that the Oba's annual holidays to the UK present an additional opportunity for ANPU London to receive direct word from the APC and the 'traditional authorities' in general, he complains that the Union is not always able to arrange a formal meeting with their king and has instead to communicate with His Royal Highness through members who are privileged to be granted individual audiences with him during his visits. Furthermore, Mr Oluwole believes that even if the Union is able to interact with the holidaying Oba once a year, this still represents a frustratingly infrequent level of communication with the individual who ultimately spearheads Omoyege 'communal effort'. "I've felt so held-back that I haven't been able to communicate with him", laments Mr Oluwole, anxious to share with his Oba the ideas for Omoyege 'progress' he has championed within the Union as one of its younger, 'modernising' executives. And having not visited 'home' for years, Mr Oluwole adds resignedly, "I've been patient to believe that I might have to wait until [the Oba] comes".

### **"The Nigerian terrain can kill the soul": collective transnational intervention and the difficulties of doing development at 'home'**

#### ***Deterring and disrupting collective transnational intervention: the enduring challenge of transnational communication***

In addition to undermining the ability of diaspora organisations to trust and collaborate effectively with local intermediaries, the difficulties of transnational communication point to how 'home' does not always represent an 'enabling environment' for collective transnational intervention. Indeed, 'home' in the Nigerian context is often seen to present major disincentives and, indeed, barriers to organised diasporic engagement. As Dr Christopher Kolade, the Nigerian High Commissioner to the UK, warned a select group of diasporic professionals gathered in London to discuss how they could come

together to contribute to the development of Nigeria, “[T]he Nigerian terrain can kill the soul. That means you must be prepared for disappointments” (Adeniyi 2006).

Among the factors routinely seen to make Nigeria a hostile rather than an enabling environment for collective diasporic intervention, an often highly unreliable and distinctly uneven communications infrastructure is highlighted as severely hindering transnational flows not only of information but also of money and materials. Despite the supposed ease with which money can be wired around the world in this ‘global’ age, some diaspora organisations that have trusted local intermediaries to handle funds on their behalf have experienced problems and delays when attempting to make electronic money transfers to their colleagues in Nigeria. For example, one of the diaspora NGOs engaged in this study uses a small Nigerian-run remittance company which is considerably cheaper than Western Union but which has not always delivered funds within the advertised time, forcing the organisation’s local programme manager to make costly and inconvenient return trips to the company’s office to collect transfers. Furthermore, when the programme manager went to collect a transfer in December 2005, he was told that the company had a limited amount of Naira available due to the high volume of remittances being sent in the build-up to Christmas. This not only delayed the transfer but also meant that the programme manager had to pay a ‘dash’ to both the manager and the cashier to ensure that the full-amount was paid out.

Sending equipment and materials to Nigeria is seen to represent an even greater challenge for diaspora organisations. With many such organisations having collected, or wanting to collect, container loads of goods for the development of ‘home’, the expense of shipping is widely seen to be made even more prohibitive by the additional, especially punitive costs associated with negotiating Nigerian ports. As the Nigerian state itself concedes, port and customs authorities are popularly considered to be among the most corrupt institutions in Nigeria and routinely refuse to release goods unless heavy, unofficial surcharges are paid (see for example, Ogah 2005 and Ogbodo 2007). Indeed, in his address to the 2006 London conference of the UK-based Engineering Forum of Nigerians, the Managing Director of the Nigerian Ports Authority acknowledged that “problems with customs practice” not only severely delay cargo in Nigeria’s ports but also mean that the total transport cost of shipping goods to Nigeria represents a “staggering” 20% of freight value compared to an international average of only 6%.

Certainly, in cases where diaspora organisations have been able to organise and finance a shipment ‘home’, they have indeed often been subjected to substantial, unofficial surcharges by the Nigerian port and customs authorities. Having already spent £4,000 to ship a 20 foot container of donated books and healthcare training equipment to its resource centre in Nigeria, one of the diaspora NGOs engaged in this study was forced to eat further into its limited resources when a port official ‘duped’ its founder into paying an additional N500,000 (about £2,000 or nearly \$3,500 at the time) to have the goods ‘released’. Similarly, when another diaspora NGO secured a donation of 8,000 HIV/AIDS awareness books from a UK-based international NGO and arranged to ship them to Nigeria, the clearing agent at the port refused to release the shipment until his demands for increasingly higher ‘tips’ were met. This forced the diaspora NGO to enter into a year-long series of negotiations with the clearing agent, who eventually settled for a ‘fee’ of nearly N300,000 (nearly £1,600/US\$2,400 at the time). Furthermore, when another diaspora NGO attempted to ship some medical equipment to a community health clinic being established in Lagos by a local nurse, it simply could not afford to pay the extra clearance charges demanded by port officials. Consequently, the shipment was never released to its intended recipient. Indeed, there are fears among organised diasporans that any equipment and materials shipped ‘home’ might well be stolen and sold-on by port officials. After all, the Nigerian state has itself acknowledged that shipments to Nigeria’s ports are “frequently misappropriated” (Nigerian Television Authority programme on the Federal Government’s anti-corruption initiatives, 19 October 2005).

### ***Deterring and disrupting collective transnational intervention: ‘home’ and the challenges of ‘the gift’ and security***

The ‘home’ environment can discourage and disrupt not only monetary and material flows of collective transnational benevolence but also the diasporic visits ‘home’ that are often so important to coordinating and implementing organised diasporic interventions. A key factor deterring many diasporans from visiting ‘home’ is the pressing expectation placed upon them to bring money to give to immediate and extended family members. As a prominent figure in the political and associational life of Ukpewha contends, “the burden of extended family” tends to “scare” diasporans from visiting (Interview, Ukpewha, October 2005). Indeed, a north London-based

member of the Ukpenwa Women's Association UK, who has not returned to Ukpenwa since 1989, reflects, "[...T]o go there now, it's not just the fare that's expensive, it's the gift. You know, you go there, they think 'oh my god, you are coming from a paradise, [...], you're bag is full of money, give, give, give, give!'" (Interview, London, April 2006).

An often even stronger deterrent to diasporic visits 'home' is a perceived lack of 'security' in Nigeria. Diasporans routinely complain of a 'breakdown of law and order' at 'home' and express deep reticence about visiting for fear of falling victim to one of the many potentially deadly dangers seen to prevail in Nigeria as a result. Prime fears include ethnic, religious, and political violence, armed 'cultist' and vigilante groups, and undisciplined and even criminal elements of the police and armed forces. The greatest diasporic fear of all, however, is 'armed robbery'. As a recent, Lagos-based university graduate with a number of friends and relatives based overseas contends of diasporans, "they're even scared to come down to Nigeria, because they think that if they do, [...], armed robbers might get to know them and they might be killed" (Interview, Lagos, August 2005). Indeed, claiming that robbers in Nigeria "don't just rob" but "rob and kill", Mrs Ademola, a stalwart of the Ayege National Progress Union (ANPU), London, asserts that she and her fellow diasporans "really worry" about "security" at 'home' and that the lack of it there "puts a lot of people off returning" (Interview, London, April 2006).

Mrs Ademola is particularly deterred from visiting her ancestral hometown of Ayege as doing so involves having to travel through Lagos where "you never know what might happen" and "robbers can appear from nowhere". And while Mrs Ademola sees Ayege as a relatively small, rural town that is not as threatening as Lagos, she is nonetheless still wary of visiting her hometown itself as it too has its own problem with 'armed robbery'. Indeed, like many communities across Nigeria, Ayege has since the dawn of the 1990s been increasingly targeted by roaming criminal gangs, visiting upon the kingdom "untold hardship and insecurity of life and property" (APC document, 1997). As we saw in Chapter 5, the Ayege Progress Committee (APC), as the executive arm of the kingdom's 'traditional authorities', established in 1996 a vigilante group in an attempt to counter this "rampant" menace (ibid). Significantly, the Oba's most important transnational envoy argues that this 'self-help' effort to tackle "armed

robbers” has been made partly to prevent diasporans from being discouraged from visiting and contributing to the kingdom:

[...]If the environment is not secure, people will not want to come home. It’s just like a nation, if there is economic instability, if there is political instability, foreign investor will not come, they will be scared. So the same thing in the town, if people don’t feel safe, if they don’t feel secure, they will not want to come. (Interview, Ayege, December 2005)

Diasporans are particularly fearful of falling victim to ‘armed robbery’ in Nigeria because they are considered to be at an especially high risk of being targeted by virtue of their assumed and sometimes flaunted relative wealth and their well-known tendency to carry notable amounts of cash for friends and relatives at ‘home’. Moreover, in addition to being aware of popular stories of ‘armed robbery’ in Nigeria, diasporans often have second- and even first-hand experience of such crime at ‘home’. Mr Oluwole reports that his parents’ house in Ayege has been “raided” several times in recent years despite the communal efforts to improve security in the kingdom (Interview, London, June 2005). Fellow ANPU London member Mrs Ademola recounts that when a Canada-based Omoyege friend of hers returned to spend Christmas 2005 in Ayege, “thieves” burgled his house there and shot one of his relatives in the leg (Interview, London, April 2006). Mrs Oni, a retired, UK-based nurse, was “robbed” of the £300 she was carrying ‘home’ as soon as she arrived back in her Lagos flat on a recent visit, her assailant apparently having got word of her return and lain in wait for her (Interview, Lagos, October 2005). Furthermore, for some diasporans, a direct threat or experience of violent crime was a key reason for deciding to leave Nigeria in the first place and remains a primary factor discouraging them from making return visits.

A lack of security, particularly as manifested through the apparent prevalence of ‘armed robbery’, not only deters the diasporic visits upon which collective transnational intervention often relies but can also directly disrupt the contributions that diaspora organisations attempt to make. This can be seen in the tragic case of Mr Abimbola and the NGO he formed in the summer of 2000 with the support of a few of his friends and relations. Later that year, Mr Abimbola travelled to Nigeria with a van-load of computers and reprographic equipment, the organisation’s first contribution towards its vision of establishing a digital resource centre in its founder’s hometown. However, Mr Abimbola was shot and killed in an ‘armed robbery’ on the house in which he was



staying and while it is unclear if the equipment he was transporting 'home' was stolen in the attack, it was not recovered and never reached its intended destination. Although some of Mr Abimbola's relations, friends, and fellow indigenes committed to continuing the work of his NGO, successfully opening the resource centre in 2003, its founder's murder was nonetheless a "major setback"<sup>4</sup> in the implementation of its transnational vision and highlights starkly the very dangers that often discourage diasporans from attempting to engage with 'home'.

The Nigerian state has certainly found diasporic fear about security at 'home' to be a major challenge in its attempts to win the support of the diaspora in its nation-building efforts. As a senior official in the Federal Government's diaspora engagement agency, the Nigerian National Volunteer Service (NNVS), contends, "most of them talk all the time about the issue of security" (Interview, Abuja, October 2005). Indeed, when the NNVS set about organising its pioneering diaspora engagement conference to be held in Abuja in June 2005, the electronic mailing list that was established to publicise the event was soon dominated by prospective diasporic attendees expressing serious concerns about their security should they visit Nigeria for the gathering. The NNVS was so concerned about the level of diasporic trepidation that the agency was compelled to issue a statement guaranteeing diasporans of their safety should they attend the conference. However, it was clear from the mailing list discussions that many potential diasporic participants remained wholly unconvinced.

***Deterring, disrupting and degenerating collective transnational intervention: a lack of technological infrastructure and the challenge of the 'Nigerian system'***

For many diasporans, security is far from the only area in which the Nigerian state has failed to make 'home' a place that is conducive to collective diasporic intervention. Indeed, diasporans often contend that the Nigerian state still has much more to do to provide an 'enabling environment' at 'home', not only in terms of ensuring better security but also in relation to tackling corruption, reforming the economy, providing public services, and improving infrastructure. As a senior NNVS official concedes, "We have not put in place the kind of environment that would give so many of them that confidence that they really need to be involved" (Interview, Abuja, October 2005).

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<sup>4</sup> Organisation trustee, interview, London, July 2004.

A key area in which the Nigerian state has failed to provide an ‘enabling environment’ at ‘home’, at least for the professional, highly-skilled diasporans whose individual and collective contributions it covets most, is in the conditions prevailing in its hospitals, universities, ‘parastatals’ and research and development centres. Although these are the very institutions to which the Nigerian state has made a priority of attracting diasporic knowledge and expertise, it stands accused both at ‘home’ and ‘abroad’ of failing to endow them with the technical facilities that would enable the adoption and utilisation of the novel and developmentally beneficial ideas and practices that diasporans are expected to bring. Writing in the *British Medical Journal* in 2003, Dr Joseph Ana, the founder of the UK-based Nigerian Medical Forum, argues that a key reason his fellow African medics left their ‘home’ countries and are dissuaded from repatriating their knowledge and skills is because of the “failure of governments [...] to create the enabling environment and provide the tools needed for their professionals to practise their expertise” (Ana 2003: 502). Indeed, when Dr Ana returned to Nigeria in 2005 to take up the invitation to become the Cross River State Commissioner for Health, a dearth of the necessary technology and equipment meant that he was unable to fulfil his desire to practise and disseminate locally the urological techniques he had acquired in the UK. While Dr Ana has assumed a position at ‘home’ from which he can attempt to ensure that the state provides facilities that are commensurate with his skills, his fellow medics in diaspora rarely enjoy such influence. Consequently, when they come together to take ‘medical missions’ to Nigeria, they very often have to face the additional challenge of sourcing and transporting their own supplies and equipment.

For many diasporans, the Nigerian state has failed to provide not only adequate facilities for the transmission and adoption of diasporic knowledge and expertise but also the necessary professional culture. Indeed, the corruption and ineptitude of the Nigerian state are widely seen to have inspired and entrenched at ‘home’ a culture of professional conduct that falls well below ‘international standards’, creating an environment in which diasporans fear, and, indeed, find, that it is extremely difficult simply to apply, let alone disseminate, the ideas and practices they feel they have imbibed ‘abroad’. As Dr Okafor, a member of the UK-based Engineering Forum of Nigerians (EFN), explains with reference to a relatively recent attempt to engage professionally with ‘home’:

I have to say one of my first forays into Nigeria was a rude awakening in terms of, ‘Christ, is it that difficult?!’ [...], I went in with dreams of how I would design a road, for example, how I would make sure that

[it had] cats eyes and lovely signs and so on to really show them that this is how you ought to be designing them. But the system had gone so bad that they wouldn't even allow you to do that, the people you were dealing with were far more interested in, well...it's difficult to say, but the system wouldn't allow you to actually do it. (Interview, London, July 2006)

Having hinted at the centrality of bribes and 'kick-backs' to the problem of operating in what is popularly known both at 'home' and in diaspora as the 'Nigerian system', Dr Okafor concludes mournfully:

I do see that a lot of people in diaspora think because they're Nigerians and [have] all good intent, all good ideas from the UK, you can just sort of take it and plant it and it will work [...]. [But] there are obstacles and you don't actually put anything in place, you won't be able to, the system might not allow you to do it even if it was a great idea.

What is more, there is a strong sense that the 'Nigerian system' can undermine professional standards to such an extent that it is difficult for visiting or returning diasporans simply to hold-on to, let alone apply and propagate, the ideas, practices, and principles they feel they have acquired in diaspora. As a founding member of EFN who has recently returned 'home' to assume a senior position in a key transport 'parastatal', Mr Ojo has certainly found this to be a major challenge:

The difficulty however with Nigeria, even I am beginning to face it, when I arrived here about ten months ago, just simply looking around, you see so much awful stuff, [...], but after a while you grow accustomed to it, which is *bad*, [...]. People here grow accustomed to poor standards, not because of their own personal failing [but] because here the environment just allows you to do so. So when I see a pot hole in the road, I would have been *disgusted* 10 months ago, now I just find my way around it and I continue on my merry way. That is the problem because the benchmark is so low and poor, the expectations are low and poor. [...]. [...T]his is why I insist I have to leave Nigeria every two months to remind myself of how things should be done so that I don't fall into this trap where I'm beginning to lower my own standards, although I can sense it happening now and then [laughs]! (Interview, Lagos, September 2005)

This epitomises how diasporans often see Nigeria as a profoundly degenerative environment in which it is a struggle to remain true to even the most basic of one's own professional principles and standards let alone begin to transfer them to others at 'home'. The 'Nigerian system', that pervasive and deeply entrenched culture of

clientalism and corruption inspired and driven by the workings of the state, is widely regarded as so formidable, all-consuming, and impervious to 'reform' that visiting or returning diasporans are generally seen to have little choice but to fall in line with its principles and practices. "The corruption is so ingrained in the society that if I went back I would either be poor or I would have to become corrupt", bemoans a UK-based Nigerian lawyer, adding, "It's a case of 'if you can't beat it, join it'" (Interview, London, July 2005). Consequently, he argues, diasporans who attempt to operate at 'home' "don't go back there and practise some of the principles that they've picked up here, they just basically regress into those bad practices again". As a fellow UK-based diasporan laments bitterly:

[...]If you stay too long in the system, you'll just start behaving like everything is right when it's not right. [...]. So that's the problem we have in Nigeria. [...]Even if the person has the best of intentions, surrounded by wolves and vultures, you can't keep being a rabbit for ever, you've got to change and before you know it everybody becomes a vulture and that's what's killing the society (Interview, London, July 2005).

### **'Home' as a hostile environment: the enduring problem of transnational trust and the challenge of local resistance**

#### ***From mistrusted partner to dangerous enemy: collective transnational intervention and the 'home' state***

In addition to failing to create an infrastructural and professional environment conducive to the reception of diasporic ideas and practices, the Nigerian state is also widely seen by diasporans to have done too little to reform itself, limiting the extent to which they regard it as a committed, reliable and effective partner for collective transnational intervention. Indeed, diasporans tend to be rather wary and sometimes even completely dismissive of engaging the Nigerian state in attempting to contribute to 'home', generally considering it too corrupt, clientalistic and inept. For many diasporans, the deeply frustrating challenges and inefficiencies they still strongly associate with acquiring Nigerian passports and visas, despite some supposed recent improvements in the process, epitomise the discouraging degree to which they feel the Nigerian state functions effectively and, indeed, is willing and able to facilitate diasporic involvement with 'home'. This off-putting impression has been fuelled further

by the ineffective, elitist and suspiciously politicised ways in which the Nigerian state is often seen to have established its official diaspora organisation and related diaspora engagement initiatives.

Furthermore, diasporans tend to be especially deterred from working with the Nigerian state because they perceive it to be 'politically unstable'. Indeed, there is a strong feeling that it is almost futile for diasporans and their organisations to attempt to forge partnerships with state actors and initiatives at 'home' as the machinations of Nigerian politics and the personalised nature of the Nigerian state mean that government officials and their programmes rarely remain in position for very long. For example, while the director of the UK-based diaspora NGO the BK Trust is in the "lucky position" of being a close friend of Dr Joseph Ana, the Cross River State Commissioner for Health, and has therefore been able to engage him and his ministry in coordinating her organisation's Calabar-based health awareness work, she is concerned that the vagaries of Nigerian politics will all too soon undermine this vital collaboration (Interview, London, June 2006). "[...]If Dr Ana is no longer the commissioner", she worries, "then the next commissioner might not want to hear about health promotion".

Such is the degree of 'instability' attributed to the Nigerian state, there is even concern that its entire effort to engage the diaspora is likely to be just another initiative that is as short-lived as the whims and tenures of the politicians and officials who drive it. Certainly, at the pioneering conference of the Federal Government's diaspora engagement agency, the Nigerian National Volunteer Service (NNVS), held in Abuja in June 2005, there was considerable scepticism among diasporic participants as to whether this agency and its programmes would survive should they be shorn of the committed and dynamic leadership of Ambassador Joe Keshi or the political backing of the Obasanjo regime, then in its second and final term. In addressing the conference, even Ambassador Keshi and President Obasanjo expressed concern that it would be necessary to formally legislate for the creation of the NNVS as an official agency of state if it was to have any hope of surviving beyond the end of Obasanjo's presidency in 2007. Indeed, with the NNVS having lost Ambassador Joe Keshi to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs since President Yar'Adua came to power, its website has ceased to function and its annual diaspora engagement conference is widely seen to have been given increasingly less publicity. Consequently, it is hardly surprising that respondents report that diasporic attendances at this supposedly emblematic event have dwindled,

apparently reaching a low of little more than 30 or so in 2009. Furthermore, respondents also claim that the Federal Government has terminated its funding of Nigerians in Diaspora Organisation, Obasanjo's great vehicle for harnessing diasporic resources and expertise.

Moreover, in the wake of the heavily disputed and deeply divisive 2007 presidential election, diasporans generally fear the demise not only of Obasanjo's nascent efforts to engage the diaspora but also his entire 'reform agenda'. While this wholesale programme for transforming and 're-orientating' the Nigerian state and economy attracted considerable scepticism and even derision from many diasporans, it had at least begun to win a measure of confidence from some and given them renewed cause to consider involving themselves more deeply with 'home'. With government widely seen to have stalled under Yar'Adua, or 'Baba Go Slow' as he has come to be known, the greatest diasporic concern is not just that any progress made under Obasanjo might grind to a halt but that it will be completely undone and even reversed, especially if, as many in diaspora and at 'home' genuinely fear, Nigeria once again returns to 'the dark days of military rule'.

However, even under a nominally democratic and progressive government, some organised diasporans still see the Nigerian state operating not so much as a potential partner of collective transnational intervention but more as its hostile enemy. For instance, there is a strong sense that any attempts by diasporans to contribute to the reform of the Nigerian state by presenting it with some of the ideas, values, and practices they feel they have acquired 'abroad' are likely to be met not with open arms but rather with potentially robust resistance. Exemplifying this, Mrs Oni, a retired, UK-trained nurse who divides her time between London and Lagos, contends that diasporans can be "afraid" to remit "what they've learnt" (Interview, Lagos, October 2005). "[...P]eople in authority might not listen to you", she explains, "and if they listen to you, if they know that what you are saying is something that will take the authority from them, then you are not safe".

Indeed, when the Chair of the British Nigeria Law Forum encouraged members at its July 2005 seminar in London to write articles in Nigerian newspapers commenting on key areas of government policy such as democratic reform and anti-corruption, an audience member voiced concern that doing so might threaten the safety of members

should they visit or return to Nigeria. As another participant explained at the post-seminar drinks, diasporans are often “reticent” about criticising government policies and officials, believing that the harsh and often brutal state repression many of them witnessed during the long years of military rule has to some extent continued under the latest ‘democratic dispensation’. Certainly, this respondent was not alone in asserting that if one “speak[s] out” against those in power at ‘home’, whether at the local, state, or federal levels of government, one may well “disappear”.

Elaborating on this fear, the co-ordinator of the UK-branch of a geo-ethnic organisation noted for protesting the political, economic, and environmental exploitation of its ancestral homeland in the oil-producing Niger Delta contends that despite the return to democratic rule in 1999, the “human rights situation” at ‘home’ is now actually “worse” than it was under military rule (Interview, London, May 2005). Claiming that state security forces recently “came for” the organisation’s ‘home’-based leader, who apparently escaped only through good fortune, he asserts, “It’s more subtle now, but they will still kill you”. Certainly, Mrs Ikendu, the director of another London-based diaspora organisation that campaigns for the political, economic, and environmental ‘rights’ of the Niger Delta, has had good reason to fear for her life at the hands of the Nigerian security forces. As we saw earlier, Mrs Ikendu’s non-violent transnational activism has not only seen her detained and interrogated by the widely feared State Security Service but also horse-whipped and permanently scarred when a combined deployment of ‘mobile police’ and soldiers forcefully broke-up a peaceful protest of Delta women in which she was participating in August 2003.

***“We don’t really need you here”: professional suspicion and resistance at ‘home’***

The way in which the Nigerian state can at times appear to be more of an enemy than a partner to collective transnational intervention points to how the ‘home’ environment in general is often considered unreceptive and even resistant to organised diasporic attempts to contribute. Indeed, the state is not alone in being accused of making ‘home’ an environment that is more hostile than enabling. The professions, which tend to be heralded as a sector in which the diaspora has much to contribute, are also widely seen to be rather suspicious of, and even averse to, diasporic efforts to engage them.

In attempting to support and develop the engineering profession at 'home', the UK-based Engineering Forum of Nigerians (EFN) is seen by some members to have received a rather guarded, potentially adversarial, reception from the professional institutes of engineering in Nigeria. "I think there is no question they would initially see people like the EFN as sort of muddying the field for them", argues a Forum member, adding, "it's sort of a case of 'we don't really need you here'" (Interview, London, July 2006). As a fellow member contends, "I think the problem of trust, [...], from already established engineering association in Nigeria is one of the core problems or challenges which the association is facing at the moment because you don't want it to be seen as a rivalry. [...B]ecause I think they think EFN is sort of, [...], usurping their own authority" (Interview, London, July 2006). Indeed, it would seem that it is only with some rather gentle diplomacy and a few "fortuitous" personal contacts that EFN has been able to forge the tentative beginnings of a cooperative interaction with the principal engineering institute at 'home', the Nigerian Society of Engineers (EFN executive, interview, London, May 2005).

Other professions appear to be even more resistant to diasporic attempts to engage them. For example, UK-based Nigerian medics and lawyers often complain that the bodies representing their respective professions in Nigeria maintain regulatory requirements that make it unnecessarily difficult for visiting or returning diasporans to practise at 'home'. The British Nigeria Law Forum (BNLF), for instance, has been compelled to call on the President of the Nigerian Bar Association to remove the "unfair restrictive practice"<sup>5</sup> that requires UK-trained lawyers to undergo a two year period of re-qualification in order to be able to practise in Nigeria. Similarly, diasporic medics have complained that their attempts to bring 'medical missions' to Nigeria are hindered by requirements to register with, and acquire temporary licenses from, medical bodies at 'home'.

Exemplifying the sceptical, sometimes hostile, attitude that is often seen to underpin such apparent "red tape", an Ibadan-based surgeon argues in a Nigerian newspaper that it is essential that the medical authorities "validate" the credentials of diasporic practitioners given the existence of "fake" qualifications from 'abroad', adding:

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<sup>5</sup> BNLF, 'Letter from the Chair, Oba Nsugbe, 21 April 2005'.



[...T]he MDCN [Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria] and the Nigerian Medical Association should be commended for living up to their responsibility of safeguarding the health of Nigerians from all these 'tokunbo'<sup>6</sup> Greek gifts in the name of 'Medical Missions', which most of the time are not as altruistic as they appear on the surface. (Olumide 2007)

Indeed, there is a strong sense at 'home' that diasporic medical and other professionals seeking to intervene transnationally are ultimately most interested in advancing their own professional and/or political careers, making contributions in an effort to win 'contract' and 'position' in Nigeria.

Given such suspicious attitudes towards diasporic professionals who attempt to make transnational interventions, it is no surprise that even when these diasporans do enjoy some success in engaging with 'home', they can still face the ongoing hostility of their local colleagues. For example, Dr Ana, whose work through the UK-based Nigerian Medical Forum (NMF) since 1991 led to his appointment as Cross River State Commissioner of Health in 2005, has encountered some considerable resistance from local practitioners in attempting to promote his ideas for health sector reform at 'home'. Indeed, Dr Ana himself concedes that his efforts both through the NMF and as Commissioner of Health to encourage continuing education and research among health professionals at 'home' are yet to find much favour with overworked and underpaid local practitioners more concerned with "mak[ing] ends meet" (Interview, Calabar, October 2005). As one local health sector professional contends, Dr Ana is often seen as a "British man" whose "ideas won't work here" (Interview, Calabar, October 2005).

***"Are you sure you are doing a good work?" Local community resistance and the enduring challenge of transnational mistrust***

Beyond the state and the professions, local communities can also make 'home' an environment that is often more hostile than enabling for collective diasporic intervention. Indeed, collective transnational contributions can be hindered and sometimes completely undermined by power struggles and disputes in local 'homelands'. For example, when the UK-branch of an association of a Yoruba subgroup attempted to send 'home' some computers for distribution to schools in each of

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<sup>6</sup> A Yoruba name meaning 'born overseas' popularly employed to refer to second-hand goods imported from abroad.

the five 'townships' in the ancestral homeland, the Obas of four of these sub-divisions initially refused to accept the computers because they were offended that the intervention had been arranged not through them but rather through the fifth and supposedly most senior Oba. The computers were eventually delivered only once the state government intervened in this latest contestation between the five Obas. However, in the case of the Wazobia State Union's plan to construct a leisure park in Ukpenwa, not even the intervention of the state government could resolve the local land dispute that prevented the project from being executed.

Furthermore, local communities can also join the state and the professions in being rather suspicious of, and even resistant to, organised diasporic interventions. Mirroring the way in which diasporans themselves so often doubt the motives of those among them who establish and lead diaspora organisations, there is much suspicion in local communities at 'home' that collective transnational interventions are intended to serve primarily the financial and political interests of the diasporans who make them. Exemplifying this pervasive attitude, an Ipaja-based nurse contends, "Nigerians [...] believe if you are a charity group, there must be something for you in it [...]. [...] When you say charities, they will say, 'oh, there's bread and butter there!'" (Interview, Ipaja, August 2005). As a Ukpenwa-based teacher argues, "you have to be suspicious of any project that a person comes back home to do", adding "there is a problem of people setting up NGOs to earn easy money" (Interview, Ukpenwa, October 2005). Indeed, a Lagos-based church leader believes this is exactly what diasporans are actually doing, forming organisations to access international donor support only to "divert these fundings to personal use" (Interview, Ipaja, August 2005).

It is with such suspicions being so prevalent at 'home' that diaspora organisations, especially those taking on the particularly mistrusted form of NGOs, often find local communities rather unreceptive and even hostile to collective transnational intervention. As the 'home'-based programme coordinator of the diaspora NGO Development Impact for Nigeria (DIFN), Pastor Bode Omokaro has certainly found it a challenge to win local support and participation for its interventions in and around Ipaja, Lagos. "[...] People have reservations", he explains, "they will look at you twice, 'Are you sure you are serious, are you sure you are doing a good work?'" (Interview, Ipaja, December 2005). Mrs Chukwu and the NGO she established to construct a maternity hospital in her 'home' community of Emeka have met even more overt local suspicion and

resistance. Since commencing the project in 1992, Mrs Chukwu and her NGO have been increasingly subject to rumour, gossip, and accusation within the community, the main theme of which is that they are building the hospital to make money for Mrs Chukwu and to provide a job at 'home' for her UK-based son, who is a medical doctor. Fuel has been added to this fire of speculation because Mrs Chukwu and her immediate UK-based family have not built a large house in the community and do not drive around in a big car, apparently indicating that they are "not doing well"<sup>7</sup> in diaspora and therefore that they have a real need to create lucrative opportunities at 'home'.

Significantly, this popular suspicion has sparked active resistance from the community. Emeka's market women have contested the location chosen for the hospital; while Mrs Chukwu has insisted on a site by the main road running along the edge of the community to ensure space for expansion and to make it accessible to neighbouring villages, the market women want it to be situated centrally near their market. Having failed to get their way, some of the market women refuse to speak to Mrs Chukwu. Furthermore, the non-cooperation of some landowners in the community has made it difficult for Mrs Chukwu and her NGO to locate and acquire a sufficient plot for the hospital. Indeed, the project has had to resort to using Chukwu family land and even then one villager has steadfastly refused to part with an adjoining parcel of land, leaving a smaller area than planned in which to construct the hospital. Ultimately, Mrs Chukwu feels that such hostility from some elements of her ancestral community has been a key factor in making the progress of the project so painfully slow.

## **Conclusion**

It is clear that collective transnational intervention can face far greater challenges than generally appears to be assumed in globalising discourses of diaspora and development. While these discourses tend to highlight the ease and strength of transnational affinities, flows and networks in this supposedly global age, we have seen that the relations London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations attempt to forge and sustain with 'home' tend to be rather cumbersome, weak and prone to fracture. At the heart of this is what appears to verge on a culture of mistrust both within the diaspora and between the diaspora and 'home'. Reflecting fears of the corruption, fraud and clientalism that are

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<sup>7</sup> Mrs Chukwu, interview, London, May 2005.

widely seen to dominate Nigerian society, this distinct lack of transnational trust not only discourages diasporans from joining and supporting organisations formed by their fellow overseas nationals but also makes diaspora organisations extremely wary of engaging local intermediaries in attempting to contribute to 'home'. This in turn means that many diaspora organisations simply do not engage local intermediaries and those that do tend to do so very tentatively, initiating rather fragile transnational relationships. In both cases, this means that the ability of diaspora organisations to operate transnationally is reduced significantly, as is the potential for exerting influence over, or transferring social remittances to, 'home'-based individuals and institutions such as 'traditional rulers' and community development committees.

It is argued that this enfeebling lack of transnational trust has much to do with the presence of a deeply disabling environment for collective transnational intervention at 'home', not least what are seen as woefully inadequate telecommunication, transport and technical infrastructures, a worrying security situation, and a corrupt, inept and often repressive state, all of which seriously discourage and disrupt the necessary border-spanning flows of people, information, money, and materials. More than this, however, the 'home' environment is seen to fuel a culture of mistrust by affording few opportunities for making an 'honest living', encouraging the growth of the alternative livelihood strategies, such as '419', that are widely seen to make Nigerians so wary of one another both at 'home' and 'abroad'. This points to how the 'home' environment faces fundamental development challenges that it is hard to imagine collective transnational intervention alone can overcome. Indeed, if states and international agencies are to support diaspora organisations in contributing to 'home', policy interventions will have to engage diaspora and 'home' simultaneously as it will only be when some of the latter's major development challenges are addressed that the diaspora will be able make a more notable contribution to progress in Nigeria. After all, it would seem that development is as much a prerequisite as an outcome of collective transnational contribution. Furthermore, it is argued that policy will again have to afford greater recognition to local agency, not only for its critical role in the transformation of 'home' but also for its ability to challenge and undermine collective transnational intervention. Only when diasporic visions and interests are brought into closer conversation with the aspirations of 'home' will it be possible to achieve meaningful and transformative transnational cooperation.

***Part 5: the power of belonging – developing ‘home’ here  
and there***

## **10. Making a ‘home from home’: the importance of developing and belonging in diaspora**

### **Introduction**

In national and globalising discourses of diaspora and development, there is a tendency to see diasporans and their organisations primarily, and sometimes exclusively, as agents of transnational intervention at ‘home’. While contributing to ‘home’ is clearly an important objective for the vast majority of diaspora organisations, the heavy academic and policy focus on this particular aspect of their functioning can elide other critical, and sometimes more important, activities they undertake in diaspora. In so doing, discourses of diaspora and development tend to overlook key imperatives and desires that forge, drive, bind, and sustain diaspora organisations and, indeed, make them in any way capable of contributing to ‘home’.

Indeed, for those who create and join diaspora organisations what is very often the most immediate imperative is a desire to develop and belong in diaspora. Consequently, many diasporans view their organisations first, and often foremost, as social spaces in which they can pursue their own progress, fulfilment and happiness in diaspora and feel at ‘home’ while ‘abroad’. From this perspective, diaspora organisations are fundamentally arenas for emotional, practical, and professional support, cultural solidarity and expression, and, often most important of all, friendship, relaxation and enjoyment. Significantly, however, this foundational concern with creating a supportive and convivial socio-cultural realm in diaspora is rarely seen to conflict with any ultimate desire to contribute to ‘home’. Indeed, these two key objectives tend to be seen as entirely compatible and, moreover, inextricably linked; it is only by coming together in an attempt to meet their own needs ‘abroad’ that diasporans are able to mobilise the necessary social, cultural, economic, and political capital to make collective interventions at ‘home’.

In this way, supporting each other, maintaining and celebrating a shared cultural identity, and enjoying conviviality become inherent to the development of ‘home’. In exploring each of these fundamental facets of diasporic associational life, I argue that discourses of diaspora and development need to give greater recognition to how they are

absolutely vital to driving, binding, and sustaining diaspora organisations and making these groups in any way capable of intervening at ‘home’. Only by broadening their conception of what elements of diasporic associational life count as, and contribute to, development will governments and international agencies be able to engage and support diaspora organisations in a way that embraces and realises their full potential for contributing to the progress of ‘home’.

### **“To be each other’s brother’s keeper<sup>1</sup>”: providing support in a foreign land**

In the face of the challenges brought by life in general and diasporic living in particular, a desire to create a space for emotional, material, and practical support is very often a founding imperative and sustaining dynamic of diaspora organisations<sup>2</sup>. This is especially true of diaspora organisations grounded in sub-national, geo-ethnic identities. Mirroring established associational practices from ‘home’, these organisations have a prime concern with employing ancestral belonging as a basis for creating and institutionalising relations of mutual support among members. Indeed, a stalwart of the Calabar Union argues that this is very much the first priority of the association:

We do help back home but it’s really about the community here. [...] We have to look after ourselves first before we can help people back there. When you come to a foreign land, you don’t have your family to support you, so you have to come together to support each other. (Interview, London, May 2005)

Certainly, a yearning for mutual support appears to be a key driver in the initial formation of geo-ethnic diaspora organisations. Recalling the “initial aims” behind the establishment of the Ukpenwa Women’s Association UK in 1992, a founding member states, “I think the first thing I could think of was for the women to come together to support each other, [...]” (Interview, London, June 2005). Similarly, a founding member contends of the Ayege National Progress Union, London, “the main idea of setting it up originally, [...], was to support ourselves here as well, not just the cause there” (Interview, London, July 2005). As the president of another Yoruba hometown

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<sup>1</sup> Ayege National Progress Union member, interview, London, July 2005.

<sup>2</sup> While this ‘social welfare’ role tends to be underplayed in globalising discourses of diaspora and development, it is very much emphasised in earlier work on migrant adaption, integration, and, to a lesser extent, transnationalism (see for example, Sassen-Koob 1979; Okamura 1983; Schoeneberg 1985; Basch 1987; Rex et al 1987; Jenkins 1988b; Rex 1991; Ireland 1994; Soysal 1994; Peil 1995; Attah-Poku 1996; AFFORD 1998; Danese 1998; Liu 1998; Minghuan 1998; Home Office 1999; Adeyanju 2000; Kerlin 2000; Owusu 2000; McLeod et al 2001).

association reflects, “a group of guys come together thinking, ‘oh yeah, we come from the same town, how do we support each other?’” (Interview, London, July 2005).

With a desire to establish relations of mutual support being such a fundamental imperative in the initial formation of geo-ethnic diaspora organisations, it tends to be reflected prominently in the constitutional foundation and long-term functioning of such groups. Indeed, providing some kind of mutual support and welfare function to members and their families is generally high among the formally stated aims and objectives of geo-ethnic diaspora organisations. For example, the second formal aim of the Efon Alaaye Association is, “To enhance the welfare and progress of Efon Alaaye indigenes in the UK and Europe” ([http://efonalaayeukandeurope.com/about\\_us.html](http://efonalaayeukandeurope.com/about_us.html)). Similarly, the third stated aim of the Nnewi Community Association is, “To provide support, help and advice to Nnewi Community members” ([www.nnewiuk.org/constitution.htm](http://www.nnewiuk.org/constitution.htm)).

Furthermore, the constitutions of geo-ethnic diaspora organisations tend not only to provide for the executive positions of a welfare officer and/or committee but also devote considerable space to detailing the support and numerous welfare benefits members can expect. For instance, the constitution of the Nnewi Community Association (NCA) states that a member is entitled to £200 for a wedding, £100 for the christening of a child, £200 upon the death of a parent, £150 upon the death of a child, and £500 upon the death of a non-member spouse. In the event of a member’s death, the NCA constitution provides for £2,000 to be given to the bereaved family and for £500 to be put towards the cost of the wake keeping and stipulates that a return ticket and £200 will be given to a member “to accompany the corpse home to Nigeria” (ibid).

Moreover, such constitutionally enshrined welfare benefits only hint at the full extent of the social support geo-ethnic diaspora organisations offer their members. In addition to formal provisions for emotional and financial support around life events such as birth, death, and marriage, a wide range of less formal, supplementary assistance is organised through these associations. In the event of the death of a member, it is generally expected that members make their own additional financial contributions and consolation visits to the bereaved family and also that they assist them with, and attend, the wake, funeral, and any subsequent annual memorial events. Members are also generally expected to give such additional, individual support to any member who is



bereaved. Similarly, when a member or a member of their immediate family has a birth, christening, birthday, marriage, anniversary, or educational or professional success to celebrate, members are again generally expected to make their own material and/or logistical contribution and attend any associated events.

Furthermore, it tends to be an established convention that if an active member is absent for one or two meetings, a member will be nominated to telephone or visit them to check on their welfare and offer any assistance that might be required. Certainly, if a member is known to be ill, in hospital, or too elderly to attend meetings, members will make regular visits and provide ongoing support. Members are also encouraged to take a healthy interest in each other's domestic life, a role sometimes supported by the practice of holding meetings on a rotational basis at members' homes. And if a member needs advice on, or mediation in, any personal, marriage, or family problems, fellow members are generally expected to assist, especially those who are attributed with the experience, wisdom, and moral authority of being 'elders'. Where medical, legal, or other professional advice is required or deemed generally useful, any suitably qualified members tend to be called on to share their knowledge and expertise.

Members also help each other to settle and advance in diaspora. When new arrivals present themselves to geo-ethnic diaspora organisations, they are provided with information and advice they might need on immigration, housing, and employment and are likely to be offered temporary accommodation by a member. If a new arrival or a member has an 'immigration problem', such associations will often extend to raising funds to engage a lawyer for them. Furthermore, members are expected to share knowledge of any education, training, employment, and investment opportunities that might be of interest to other members and their families. Members are also encouraged to share business expertise and services with each other and to patronise enterprises run by fellow members. Geo-ethnic diaspora associations as corporate entities also patronise members' businesses, for example to print associational documents, to produce videos and DVDs of associational events, and to host or cater for associational parties. One such organisation even donates useful equipment to members establishing new businesses. And in many cases, these organisations extend rotational credit or hardship funds to members.

Significantly, the provision of such an array of benefits can be seen as central to binding and sustaining geo-ethnic diaspora organisations. Indeed, it is the prospect of enjoying such social support that is often identified as a primary motivation for joining, and becoming actively involved in, these associations. For example, having detailed the wide range of support offered by the Ukpenwa Women's Association UK (UWA), Mrs Emanu, a committed member of the association, contends:

I think all of those things put together, it actually makes me see the organisation as something I want to belong to. It's like having a family where you don't have one, confiding, [...], encouraging, helping out here and there, [...], you know, just help and support, things that your own family would do for you so that you don't feel that you don't have anybody here. [...] It's good for you to have a back-up as if you're back home. (Interview, London, April 2006)

The support given to members during bereavement appears to play an especially important role in attracting and attaching diasporans to their geo-ethnic associations. For example, Ms Ibrune of the UWA suggests that she has become a much more committed member of the association in response to the "very helpful" support it afforded her when her mother died in 2000 (Interview, London, April 2005). Similarly, a UK-raised diasporan in her mid-twenties who was always rather "cynical" about the purpose of her parents' 'hometown' and 'home-state' associations now contributes to these groups in the light of the support they gave her family when her father passed away in 2004:

I've learnt that they are support networks as well at the very least and also I think their existence has been maybe validated for me since we lost my dad and I saw how the communities really came together in their own ways to help, whether it was the women coming to stay with my mum, people phoning, people from the different communities coming to visit us, coming to just give us strength. Everyone really helped and it was organised on a personal level and a family level and then on that organisational level as well. So I can see now the good work that they're doing and I know that they do a lot of fundraising events that I will support, raffle tickets, jumble sales and so on, because I know that the money will be going somewhere [...]. (Interview, London, June 2006)

Indeed, detailing how members "create 'Love Unlimited' by caring for one another", an annual report of the Ukpenwa Women's Association UK (UWA) affirms the importance of such mutual support in sustaining geo-ethnic diaspora associations, stating, "It is this type of friendliness and love in most cases that binds the Organisation together" (UWA

annual report, 2004). Such yearnings for mutual support are also central to the formation and maintenance of associations of diasporic professionals. Indeed, these organisations also tend to have a central concern with creating a space through which diasporans can help each other to settle, cope, and advance ‘abroad’. In some cases, these organisations mirror geo-ethnic associations by making formal provisions for members to receive moral and financial support around important life events. For example, the Nigerian Nurses Charitable Association pursues an objective “To offer support to individual members in joyous or sorrowful circumstances such as death of close relatives to members, marriage, birth” ([www.nncauk.org/aims.htm](http://www.nncauk.org/aims.htm)). More generally, diasporic professional associations are seen to reflect their geo-ethnic counterparts by constituting an arena in which diasporans can develop new social relationships and augment their informal support networks. However, beyond their creation of formal and informal avenues for social support, diasporic professional associations are generally most appreciated for the opportunities they afford members to develop professionally.

Accordingly, the first stated objective of the Engineering Forum of Nigerians (EFN) is “to promote the exchange of ideas and engineering knowledge and create networking opportunities among Nigerian engineers in the UK” ([www.efn.org.uk](http://www.efn.org.uk)). Indeed, while EFN’s founders are primarily concerned with making collective transnational interventions at ‘home’, they reason that if the organisation is to attract meaningful numbers it also has to “facilitate members’ career aspirations in the UK” (EFN executive, interview, London, May 2005). To this end, EFN holds ‘networking events’ at which members can interact with, and learn from, the well-established and highly successful engineers who are largely responsible for driving the association. EFN also devoted its 2005 ‘annual Spring event’ to discussing ‘engineering opportunities and professional development’. This seminar not only saw some prominent members sharing their experiences of forging a successful engineering career in the UK but also included a presentation by a representative of the Institution of Civil Engineers on how to obtain professional accreditation in the UK. Furthermore, EFN affords members additional opportunities to establish and develop their engineering careers in the UK by publicising sometimes privileged information about training and employment vacancies on a member’s-only area of its website and by giving space for members to advertise their engineering products or companies in its publications and at its events.

Significantly, and as EFN's founders intended, offering members opportunities to launch and advance their careers in the UK plays a key role in attracting and attaching them to the association. For example, in outlining his reasons for becoming an active member of EFN, Dr Daramola asserts, "it's going to help my professional development" (Interview, London, July 2006). Referring to the luminaries of the association, he explains, "I know that I can always learn from the so-called giants who have done so well in this country". In particular, he feels that these highly experienced and successful members will be able to help him in his ongoing efforts to acquire chartered status with the Institution of Mechanical Engineers (IME) in the UK. "As a matter of fact", he adds, "one of the EFN members, I hope to or I plan to have him as one of my mentors, [...]. He's a member of, a *fellow* of, IME here, he knows a lot of people, he can write a reference letter, so I think I will probably gain from that [...].

Facilitating social support and mutual progress is central to driving and sustaining not only diaspora organisations grounded in geo-ethnic and professional identities but also many of the diaspora organisations that take the form of NGOs. Indeed, while most diaspora NGOs have a prime concern with contributing to development at 'home', many also have a strong desire to further socio-economic advancement in diaspora, or what Mohan (2002) aptly terms 'development in the diaspora'. Orienting their interventions not only towards 'home' but also towards diaspora, these NGOs attempt to support the welfare and 'empowerment' of Nigerians in the UK by providing advice and advocacy on issues such as immigration, employment, housing, discrimination, health, education, and state services and benefits. Some of these organisations also offer diasporans additional services such as 'cultural mediation' in dealing with statutory bodies, bereavement counselling and support, business and skills training, and specialised programmes for youth, the elderly, those with mental health problems, and prisoners.

Significantly, it is providing such support and welfare services that has enabled a number of these NGOs to obtain some diasporic support and some short-term, project specific funding from local authorities and national funding bodies in the UK. Although this funding is generally rather modest and sporadic, it has at least helped these NGOs to eke out an existence and become a little more established. For example, such funding has often just about enabled recipient directors to establish offices for their respective NGOs and/or work for them on a full-time basis. With a slightly more solid

organisational base in place, these NGOs can become more capable of being utilised as vehicles for transnational intervention at 'home'. For instance, having attracted some community and statutory funding through its efforts to tackle socio-economic exclusion among Nigerians in the UK, Nigerian Women for Development (NWD) has been able to start pursuing its transnational aspiration to 'empower' 'grassroots' women in the Niger Delta.

Furthermore, NWD's founder argues that the organisation's work to further the welfare and progress of Nigerians in the UK heightens not only its own transnational capabilities but also those of individual diasporans. Indeed, it is widely held among organised diasporans that the provision of social support 'abroad' not only attracts participation and resources for diaspora organisations and their transnational projects but also increases the ability and desire of individual diasporans to contribute to the development of 'home'. Contending that the Engineering Forum of Nigerians presents him with opportunities to develop professionally in the UK, a member of the association asserts, "When I'm fully established here, I will be able to start thinking of doing something to help back home" (Interview, London, June 2006). Concordantly, an executive of the Ayege National Progress Union (ANPU), London, opines, "[...]if we can expand people's ability to undertake what they are capable of doing, they would be more willing to see themselves being able to help back home more as well" (Interview, London, June 2005). As a fellow ANPU London member contends:

[...]It is when we are comfortable that we will be able to contribute to our community. But that will only happen when we are together because we do learn from each other, not only financially but the way we do things as well [...]. So the more we are, the bigger we are, the better. (Interview, London, July 2005)

**"We have to remember what we call culture"<sup>3</sup>: preserving and promoting the heritage of 'home'**

In the creation and maintenance of diasporic associational life, a concern with facilitating mutual support and progress is often intimately bound-up with, and augmented by, a yearning to reproduce and celebrate a shared cultural identity<sup>4</sup>. Indeed,

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<sup>3</sup> ANPU London member, interview, June 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Again, this is an aspect of diasporic associational life that attracted more attention in earlier work on migrant adaption, integration, and transnationalism (see for example, Sassen-Koob 1979; Okamura 1983;

a desire to forge a diasporic space for cultural ‘preservation’ and expression is often another key founding and sustaining imperative of diaspora organisations. Again, this is especially true of diaspora associations grounded in sub-national, geo-ethnic identities. As a stalwart of ANPU London argues, a primary reason for forming such organisations is “to maintain our culture as it is back home” (Interview, London, July 2005).

Concordantly, Mrs Ohaje recalls that a desire to create a diasporic space in which to reproduce and uphold the culture of ‘home’ was a key factor bringing her and her fellow founding members together to form the Ukpenwa Women’s Association UK in 1992. “[...T]here was a lot of emphasis on promoting our culture”, she contends (Interview, London, June 2006). In particular, she argues, there was an especially strong desire to organise in an attempt to sustain the use of the Ukpenwa language; “[...O]ur language is becoming extinct and we felt that if we come together, we’ll speak our language ...”.

With a desire to ‘preserve’ and ‘promote’ ancestral culture so often playing such a key role in compelling diasporans to come together to form geo-ethnic associations, it tends to be reflected strongly in the constitutions and long-term functioning of these organisations. Indeed, constitutional provision is often made for the executive to include a ‘cultural secretary’ and/or ‘cultural committee’. Furthermore, upholding ancestral culture is usually high on the list of formal associational aims and objectives. For example, the first stated aim of the Ijaw People’s Association is “to preserve the cultural heritage of the Ijaw people” ([www.ijawland.com/aboutus.html](http://www.ijawland.com/aboutus.html)). Similarly, the second stated aim of the Nnewi Community Association is “to promote awareness and understanding of Nnewi customs and culture” ([www.nnewiuk.org/constitution.htm](http://www.nnewiuk.org/constitution.htm)).

With a stated objective “to promote and maintain our rich cultural heritage” (OWA constitution), the Ukpenwa Women’s Association UK (OWA) also places much emphasis on creating a diasporic space for the formal and informal reproduction of ancestral culture. Indeed, a recent annual report of the OWA states, “The cultural aspect of our tradition has been paramount within the Ukpenwa Women’s Association. We have tried as much as possible to bring forth our tradition to the limelight despite the fact that we are far away from home” (UWA annual report, 2004). In its efforts to ‘bring

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Schoeneberg 1985; Basch 1987; Cheetham 1988; Peil 1995; Attah-Poku 1996; AFFORD 1998; Goldring 1998; Minghuan 1998; Landolt et al 1999; Popkin 1999; Adeyanju 2000; Kerlin 2000; Ndofor-Tah 2000; Owusu 2000).

forth' ancestral cultural 'tradition', the UWA has devoted particular attention to reproducing and sustaining in diaspora what is widely celebrated both at 'home' and 'abroad' as the distinct and especially delicious cuisine of Ukpewwa. In addition to holding "workshops" for members to share with each other their knowledge of "Ukpewwa cooking", the UWA documents Ukpewwan recipes and aims ultimately to produce an "Ukpewwa cook book" (UWA members, interviews, London, April 2005 and April and June 2006). Beyond cuisine, the association directs much effort to rehearsing and performing Ukpewwan songs, dances and plays as well as 'traditional' death and marriage ceremonies, enacting the latter not only for UWA members and their relatives but also for members of the wider UK-based Ukpewwa diaspora.

Significantly, a desire to participate in such collective cultural 'maintenance' often plays a key role in attracting and binding members to geo-ethnic diaspora organisations. For example, in detailing what motivates her to be such an active member of the UWA, Mrs Ohaje contends, "we promote our culture", adding, "I love our culture, I love dancing, Ukpewwa music and all that [...]" (Interview, London, June 2006). Similarly, in outlining her reasons for being a committed member of ANPU London, Mrs Obafemi states, "I'm a cultural woman, I love our culture" (Interview, London, July 2005). "I love to identify with where I'm from", she continues, detailing how it is very important to her to have a social space in which she can continue to speak in her ancestral 'dialect', recall wise adages and folkloric tales from the homeland, eat 'traditional' food, and wear 'traditional' clothes.

Furthermore, through their efforts to 'preserve' and 'promote' ancestral culture, geo-ethnic diaspora associations not only attract a core of committed members but can also gain some important additional participation and support from beyond the generally limited active membership. This can be seen most explicitly at the major cultural events that geo-ethnic associations generally aspire to hold annually. Through the display and celebration of aspects of the 'host' association's cultural heritage, these convivial and entertaining occasions attract diasporic co-ethnics who are not usually actively involved in the association. As the president of the Wazobia State Union contends, "there's so many people from Wazobia State that come out from the woodwork at events" (Interview, London, June 2006). Similarly, Mrs Emanu, the president of the Ukpewwa Women's Association UK (UWA), claims that at their annual cultural event "a lot of the

members you don't see will turn up [...], [...] they love the dance!" (Interview, London, April 2006).

Such cultural festivities also draw individuals and organisations from the wider Nigerian diaspora and UK society in general. As Mrs Emanu explains, the UWA's cultural events attract "other Nigerian organisations within the country" and "friends that we met here who are not even from Nigeria". Indeed, the UWA's 2006 cultural event not only drew far more Ukpenwans than the 15 or so women who sustain the association through their committed membership but also attracted a geo-ethnically diverse array of diasporic Nigerians and their organisations as well as at least a dozen non-Nigerians, swelling the total attendance to about 250 people. As one UWA stalwart contends, "you only need to see when we do events, people will come, they love the food, they love the cultural displays, so they will come" (Interview, London, June 2006).

Critically, employing ancestral culture to draw in participation and support from beyond the generally rather narrow confines of the committed membership is very often key in sustaining geo-ethnic diaspora organisations and their transnational visions for contributing to development at 'home'. Indeed, while the cultural events that such associations hold are explicitly framed and undoubtedly enjoyed as displays and celebrations of ancestral heritage, they are also very much intended to be fundraising events. As an active member of the UWA claims, "we have cultural display [...], it's just a way of raising funds" (Interview, London, April 2005).

Accordingly, such events not only have an entry fee but also tend to involve other fundraising activities such as auctions and raffles, the 'spraying'<sup>5</sup> of performers, the setting aside of time for participants to make donations to the 'host' organisation, and the appointment and recognition of wealthy and esteemed individuals as 'chairs', 'supporters' or 'patrons' of the occasion. Coupled to the attraction of cultural display and celebration, these fundraising strategies are able to generate a substantial, often critical, boost to the income of the 'host' organisation. As an executive of the UWA attests, "we sell the ticket and we promise Ukpenwa food and all that entertainment, so it's always a huge turn out and we manage to raise some money as well that will see us through the following year or two years" (Interview, London, April 2006). Indeed, the

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<sup>5</sup> The practice of recognising and celebrating performers by placing money on them.



UWA's finances were augmented substantially by its 2006 cultural event, which raised some £4,000, more than double what the association had in its accounts.

Moreover, the attempts made by geo-ethnic organisations to raise money through cultural events are often directly and explicitly linked to their efforts to contribute to development at 'home'. Indeed, the fundraising that geo-ethnic organisations do through cultural events is often specifically targeted at making interventions at 'home'. As the president of the Wazobia State Union contends, "we are having an event in August and we are hoping to use the donations from that event to do one or two activities back home" (Interview, London, June 2006). Similarly, a stalwart of the Ukpenwa Women's Association UK (UWA) remarks, "each fund raising event we want to do we will say we want to raise money for a particular project at home" (Interview, June 2005). Accordingly, the UWA's 2006 cultural celebration was advertised as raising funds "in aid of special needs people in Ukpenwa" (UWA flyer, 2006). In the event, the occasion successfully enabled the UWA to make a £200 contribution to a "centre for the blind" being built in the city (UWA President, personal communication, September 2006). Indeed, with the funds raised internally through members' dues and donations tending to prove insufficient, it is often only the finance that is generated through cultural events that enables geo-ethnic diaspora organisations to begin to pursue their transnational aspirations. In this way, the 'preservation' and 'promotion' of ancestral cultural heritage in diaspora can be seen as critical to the pursuit of development at 'home'.

***"So they can know themselves": passing on the heritage of 'home'***

The cultural 'maintenance' activities of geo-ethnic diaspora organisations are seen to further augment collective transnational capabilities through their particular targeting of younger diasporans, especially those who have been born and/or brought up 'abroad'. A desire not only to 'preserve' ancestral culture but also to 'pass it on' to younger generations is often a key imperative drawing diasporans together to form and sustain geo-ethnic associations. For example, this desire was central to Mrs Emanu's decision to join the Ukpenwa Women's Association UK (UWA) in 1994; "I looked at their aims and their objectives and I liked what they were doing, the whole idea for me then as at that time was a place where my children could learn about my culture, where I come from..." (Interview, London, April 2006).

Indeed, like many other geo-ethnic diaspora organisations, the UWA has since its formation placed much emphasis on such cultural transmission, the second part of its founding overall aim stating, “To ensure our zeal for our heritage is passed on to the next generation” (UWA constitution). To this end, the UWA has made constitutional provision for the executive position of Youth Co-ordinator, one of the roles of which is to “be responsible for teaching the youth the Ukpenwa culture/language” (ibid). While financial and logistical constraints have undermined efforts by the UWA and other geo-ethnic diaspora associations to hold ancestral language classes for the ‘next generation’, such groups have attempted to transfer something of their cultural heritage to younger constituents by encouraging them to have at least a degree of involvement in associational activities, especially major cultural events. For example, a stalwart of the UWA argues, “[...W]hen we’re organising a big dance like we’re going to do in July this year, we involve the kids; the kids are going to come round and practise all those traditional dances with us, we are teaching them how to dance and sing our traditional songs [...], so it’s something” (Interview, London, April 2006). Indeed, like those held in previous years, the UWA’s 2006 cultural event saw several young diasporans participate in the performances of Ukpenwan heritage.

Significantly, what tends to underpin the desire to come together in an attempt to transfer ancestral culture to the ‘next generation’ is a profound concern with the development of ‘home’. There is a firm belief among committed members of geo-ethnic diaspora organisations that younger diasporans who have grown-up ‘abroad’ will only develop an attachment and commitment to their ‘home’ community and its progress if they are encouraged to appreciate its culture. As a stalwart of the Ayege National Progress Union, London, opines, “we want the children [...] to grow up knowing a lot about Ayege culture so that they at least will have ties; if not, they will all be lost, no-one will want to contribute to ‘home’ in the future [...]” (Interview, London, July 2005).

While active members of geo-ethnic organisations tend to express great disappointment at the extent to which they have succeeded in transferring ancestral culture to younger diasporans, it seems that they might at least have planted in the ‘next generation’ the seeds of affinity with ‘home’ out of which could grow a new wave of collective transnational intervention. For example, although Ms Joy Akwehe “wasn’t really that

interested” when she used to be taken along to the cultural events held by her parents’ Ukpewa associations, she did feel it was ‘her’ heritage that was being displayed (Interview, London, June 2006). Now in her late twenties and soon to marry, Joy is looking forward to having children of her own and has consequently become much more interested in exploring the Ukpewa culture that her parents and their geo-ethnic associations had introduced to her:

I really don’t want my children to feel they are just English, [...]. So it’s really important for me to know my culture and build a relationship with Ukpewa so that I can pass the same on to my children so that my children will become familiar with it and won’t be cynical about it.

A key way in which Joy thinks she might attempt to deepen her engagement with her ancestral culture is by being “more involved” with her parent’s Ukpewa associations. Significantly, Joy believes that if she did become more active in these organisations and through them developed a stronger attachment to Ukpewa and its culture, she would then begin to do more to support their “projects” at ‘home’.

Furthermore, the efforts of diaspora organisations to ‘pass on’ the culture of ‘home’ are seen to heighten not only the desire of the ‘next generation’ to support collective transnational intervention but also their ability to do so. It is often argued that if younger diasporans, particularly those brought-up ‘abroad’, are to have the confidence to progress and prosper in diaspora, it is necessary for them to have a strong and positive sense of ‘their’ cultural heritage and identity. Indeed, diaspora NGOs that have a particular concern with what can be described as ‘development in the diaspora’ often seek to ‘promote’ the culture of ‘home’ in an attempt to ‘empower’ Nigerians brought-up in the UK. For example, in its “mission” to further the social and economic “inclusion” of Nigerians in the UK, the Nigerian Community Forum (NCF) aims “to enhance and ensure the promotion of Nigerian cultural heritage and history” (NCF document, n.d.). Its Chief Executive argues that a tendency to “forget their culture” turns the minds of young, UK-raised diasporans “upside down”, hindering their socio-economic advancement (Interview, London, September 2004). Consequently, his NGO organises “Nigerian Culture, History and Language Classes” (NCF document, n.d.) so that “the youth” can “appreciate their roots” (Chief Executive, interview, London, September 2004). In the words of the director of a diaspora NGO that publishes “traditional” stories and organises an annual festival in an attempt to “increase

awareness and knowledge of Nigerian culture” among young diasporans, the logic is, “if you don’t know where you come from, you cannot move forwards” (Interview, London, August 2004).

### **“The joy of the meeting”: identifying, socialising and having fun**

What is very often the most immediate and important imperative bringing diasporans together to forge and sustain organisations is a desire to create a diasporic space of sociability, companionship and conviviality. This key associational yearning is for an arena ‘abroad’ in which one can socialise, consolidate old friendships and create new ones, and, often most importantly of all, relax and enjoy oneself. Consequently, many diasporans view their organisations first, and often foremost, as cherished spaces of familiarity, friendship and fun. From this perspective, it is a diasporic desire for sociability, companionship, and conviviality that is often fundamental to the creation and sustenance of diasporic associational life and any potential it may hold for contributing to development at ‘home’.

While it can be seen in the emergence of all forms of diaspora organisation, the importance of the yearning for sociability is especially apparent in the formation and functioning of diaspora organisations grounded in geo-ethnic identities. As an active member of the Calabar Union and Cross River State Union contends when explaining the purpose of geo-ethnic diaspora organisations, “we all find ourselves living in the UK, we have to create a platform for us to be able to socialise ...” (Interview, London, June 2005). Similarly, an executive of the Ayege National Progress Union, London, highlights the centrality of this social imperative in the creation of his association; “the origin of it was to initially act as a kind of social gathering for the people from that part of the world here” (Interview, London, July 2005).

With the desire for sociability being so important in bringing diasporans together to form geo-ethnic associations, it tends to be reflected strongly in the constitutional foundation of these organisations. Indeed, their formal aims and objectives usually highlight a prime concern with arranging ‘social activities’ and augmenting the ‘social life’ of members. For example, the first stated aim of a London-based Ijaw ‘club’ is to “Promote a purely social and harmonious forum for members to meet and interact periodically” ([www.londontaricclub.com](http://www.londontaricclub.com)). In pursuance of such aims, geo-ethnic

diaspora associations often make constitutional provision for a social secretary or committee, charging them with the responsibility of organising social events and group outings.

Underpinning the formal social objective of geo-ethnic organisations is often a specific constitutional aim to encourage some kind of companionship within the association. For instance, one of the key stated aims of an Egba-Yoruba 'hometown association' is "To foster friendship and cooperation among its members" (Organisation document, 2005). Indeed, within the social imperative bringing diasporans together to form and sustain geo-ethnic organisations is a particular and strongly felt desire to nurture companionship through the consolidation of pre-existing friendships and the creation of new ones. For example, the chairman of the an Ekiti-Yoruba 'hometown association' argues that the main reason for forming the association in 1997 was to encourage more regular social interaction between three co-ethnic nuclear families, including his own, who had been good friends back in Nigeria but who had struggled to see as much as they would have liked of each other since moving to London in the mid to late 1980s. It was also hoped, he adds, that the Union would grow, enabling the three founding families to forge new friendships with other co-ethnic individuals and families known to be based in the UK.

Similarly, an executive of the Ayege National Progress Union (ANPU), London, contends that it was primarily a desire to rekindle old friendships and acquaintances and establish new ones that led him to join the association a few months after arriving in the UK in 1989. Explaining what joining the Union meant to him at that time, he argues, "I think it was more social, it allowed me to come across people that I maybe hadn't seen in a long time or hadn't come across before" (Interview, London, June 2005). Concordantly, in recounting her reasons for seeking out the association, a fellow active member recalls, "[...W]hen I travelled from Nigeria, come to London, [...], I'm happy to meet a group of friends, my old class-mates, and make new friends" (Interview, London, April 2006). Indeed, among the 15 or so stalwarts of ANPU London, some have known each other since being at school together in Ayege while others have forged close friendships in diaspora during the 15 or so years in which they have been members of the association. Significantly, it is by enabling both the maintenance of long-standing friendships from 'home' and the construction of new friendships in diaspora that the Union is seen to provide the companionship so keenly sought by its

founders and committed members. As one stalwart attests in reflecting on the central purpose of forming and sustaining the Union, “we just want to know each other so that we’re very close” (Interview, London, April 2006).

Intimately bound-up with this yearning for sociability and companionship through geo-ethnic association is a particularly strong desire to create a diasporic social space in which to relax and have fun. Emphasising the importance of this convivial imperative in the foundation and ongoing operation of ANPU London, an executive contends of the Union, “as a social gathering it’s always been very good because then we have somewhere to go out and socialise every last Saturday of the month, [...], it’s always good to have a bit of enjoyment and relaxation in your normal course of working day-to-day” (Interview, London, June 2005). Similarly, in accounting for her highly committed membership of the Ukpenwa Women’s Association UK (UWA), Mrs Ohaje enthuses of the organisation, “[...]It is really fun because when we meet [...] there is singing, [...], and we do relaxation programmes, we talk, [...], we look at crafts, we look at cooking” (Interview, London, June 2006). Concordantly, in detailing what draws members to participate actively in the UWA, an executive of the association proclaims, “[...]We relax, we chill out, we sing songs, we are happy!” (Interview, London, April 2006)

While geo-ethnic organisations do in some cases arrange occasional ‘outings’ and ‘trips’ to places of leisure such as amusement parks, it is their regular, usually monthly, meetings that are very much the main, and most deeply cherished, space of associational relaxation and enjoyment. As Mr Akinmade of ANPU London contends:

Most of the time, even the meeting will turn into social event [...]. [...]We use it as a social area, to interact socially, and that’s why alcohol and food is provided by the host, [...] we see it as a commitment that ‘how can my kin’s brothers and sisters come to my place and they won’t eat or drink?!’ (Interview, London, July 2005)

Indeed, although the meetings of geo-ethnic diaspora organisations open and proceed as formal gatherings at which associational affairs are orderly and soberly discussed, the close of official business generally heralds the serving of a generous spread of ‘traditional’ dishes and favourite tipples and sparks a vibrant crescendo of news, gossip, banter and laughter, remaking a rather austere occasion into a profoundly convivial event that often runs late into the night and sometimes into the early hours of the next

morning. In the words of an ANPU London member, this “social aspect” represents “the joy of the meeting” (Interview, London, March 2006).

Such joy was especially apparent at a monthly meeting of the Ukpemwa Women’s Association UK (UWA) when, soon after the close of formal business and as the food members had prepared was being served, a joke threw one of the assembled women into hysterics. Upon recovering her composure, she chuckled, “When I get home from meetings, I’m always still laughing to myself – my neighbours must wonder what I’m up to!” Indeed, it was evident that members of the UWA share the sentiment expressed by the president of the women’s wing of an Igbo ‘town union’; “We like to let our hair down!” (Interview, London, July 2005). Clearly, as one UWA member put it, “a big part of the meeting is about having fun” (Interview, London, March 2006).

Significantly, the promise of relaxation, joy and fun not only draws members to the regular meetings of geo-ethnic diaspora organisations but also attracts participants to the major cultural events that these groups tend to aspire to hold annually. While these occasions undoubtedly win much support because they are seen to ‘preserve’, ‘promote’, and ‘pass on’ ancestral culture, it is clear that they also attract participation and benevolence simply because they promise a ‘good time’. As the president of an Ijebu-Yoruba ‘hometown association’ contends, “we get two to three hundred at our events – people like to come and party!” (Interview, London, September 2004). Indeed, it is the sheer enjoyment offered by such events that is often seen to be their main attraction, drawing participants not only from London but also from the UK regions, Ireland, continental Europe, North America and even Nigeria itself. From this perspective, it is principally through their promise of conviviality that these fundraising events can be seen to attract the financial support that, as we saw above, is so often critical to sustaining geo-ethnic diaspora associations and their transnational visions.

**“To know ourselves”<sup>6</sup>: from sociability, companionship and conviviality to a sense of belonging ‘abroad’**

What is most important about sociability, companionship and conviviality in sustaining geo-ethnic diaspora organisations and their interventions at ‘home’ is how they are generative of a profound sense of belonging. Indeed, what very often appears to be the

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<sup>6</sup> ANPU member, interview, London, July 2005.

primary imperative bringing diasporans together to forge and maintain such associations is a desire to create a social space of familiarity, friendship and fun through which they can feel at 'home' while 'abroad'. It is in attending to this yearning for an arena in which to relax, enjoy and, above all, belong that geo-ethnic organisations ultimately win the loyalty and support of diasporans. Time and time again and with heartfelt emphasis, active members of such groups contend that it is through the companionship and joy of geo-ethnic associational life that they find a deeply cherished 'home from home', a place in diaspora to which they can belong and to which they are therefore strongly attached and highly committed.

As Mr Akinmade asserts of the Ayege National Progress Union (ANPU), London, "[...W]hen you see your own people, when they come here to visit me, I feel at home. We talk, we eat the same food and everything and that really matters you know" (Interview, London, July 2005). Fellow ANPU London stalwart Mr Oluwole elaborates:

I think the culture in Ayege especially, it's a very tight-knit community and people really have the values that they share, in the language, in the behaviour, in the socials, so being associated with the group is very important [...]. [...] It makes us closer, you can feel that you can talk to somebody who will understand where you are coming from and where you are going, and that closeness has been well-maintained [...]. In order to maintain it like that, we decided to keep the meetings held at individual's houses, [...], the fact that you invite us to your home shows that you open your heart to us, [...], and we come and celebrate and we have our meeting but, most especially, we socialise as well. So typically you would prepare food for us, and it is food again that is what we are used to, you know, the pounded yam, the soup, the meats. So all those kind of things add up to making you feel like you are part of the community, that you are a member and relate to it well.

Striking a concordant note, Ms Ibrune reflects on what attracts her to the Ukpwenwa Women's Association UK (UWA):

It's a forum that you go there, you unwind, you meet your people, you speak the same language [...]. [...] It's a forum that we all come together because we know ourselves, it's just like one big family. [...] We joke, we laugh, we talk, we care about each other, you know? So I feel it's just that togetherness [...]. (Interview, London, April 2005)

Similarly, in explaining why she is such a committed member of UWA, Mrs Ohaje enthuses:



I think what motivates me is the fact that, at the end of the month, taking four or five hours out to be with the women is top of my priority because when you go there, you laugh, we share things together, you share the culture together, even the language you share together. So I look forward to going because I think being within the group is being at another place, it's one way in which I can socialise with my people, I can be with my people. (Interview, London, June 2006)

As the president of an Ijesha-Yoruba hometown association contends, "We meet every month in each other's house, cook for each other, have family parties, just to network and to have that sense of belonging" (Interview, London, July 2006). Concurring, the president of an Igbo state union reflects, "It's to create a new world, to have an identity, a sense of belonging" (Interview, London, May 2005).

It is clear that diaspora organisations grounded in geo-ethnic identities are very often forged, sustained and cherished primarily as spaces of companionship, joy, and, ultimately, belonging. It is this promise of a much sought after arena of familiarity, friendship and fun in which one can feel at 'home' while 'abroad' that attracts and holds so much of the participation and support that these groups enjoy. Significantly, other forms of diaspora organisation also draw much of their vitality from the space they create for companionship, conviviality and belonging. For example, non-geo-ethnic diaspora organisations taking on the form of NGOs and professional associations very often emerge out of pre-existing friendship networks, create opportunities for new friendships to be forged, produce space for sociability, and represent a further avenue through which to feel at 'home' in diaspora.

The diaspora NGO, Development Impact for Nigeria (DIFN), for instance, was founded in 1999 by a group of six UK-based Nigerians who had become good friends over a decade or so of living in the same east London neighbourhood and attending the same local church. Having spent much of their social time together discussing Nigeria and its progress, these friends one day decided to take more direct action to support development at 'home'. As the prime mover in the group, Mr Yomi Oloko recalls, "As a group of friends, we got together and said, 'we need to do something'" (Interview, London, July 2005). "[...]It was a case of saying, 'it's alright debating about these things, what are we actually going to do about it?'" concurs Mr Ade Fashade, another key member of the group (Interview, London, July 2006). "So we met on a Saturday

afternoon and decided to set up Development Impact for Nigeria, really just off-the-cuff”, continues Ade, “It wasn’t anything formal or anything, we just decided we were going to start this, meet in each others house once in a while and discuss how we can go about it”.

While DIFN was undoubtedly founded with the primary aim of contributing to ‘home’, it is clear that its founders also wanted to create a strong rationale for continuing to come together as friends, especially as busy London life seemed to continually leave less time for socialising and, more importantly, as members began to move out to different suburbs and satellite towns. This desire to maintain companionship and conviviality through the formation and operation of DIFN is most apparent when the group meets at a member’s home to discuss the NGO’s affairs. Reflecting the typical course of events at the regular gatherings of geo-ethnic associations, the formal business of DIFN trustee meetings tends to soon give way to the serving of food and drink and the jovial exchange of news, stories and general banter. Sometimes meetings even take place on a weekday evening over a few beers in a pub or bar, the emphasis of the gathering tending to shift promptly from DIFN affairs to the business of unwinding after a hard day’s work.

Furthermore, DIFN and diaspora NGOs in general tend not only to build-on and maintain established relations of friendship and conviviality but also, in further reflection of geo-ethnic associations, seek to attract wider diasporic support by holding events that involve a notable degree of sociability. While DIFN has not gone as far as other diaspora NGOs in organising such highly sociable occasions as fundraising parties, cultural celebrations and sponsored ‘fun runs’, it has arranged awareness seminars that double as congenial ‘networking’ events.

Significantly, through the conviviality of DIFN meetings and events, trustees are not only able to maintain old friendships but also have an opportunity to forge new ones. Indeed, in the course of trying to promote DIFN’s work to the wider diaspora, the trustees have come to meet other UK-based Nigerians, some of whom have become good friends not only of the organisation but also of the trustees themselves. Similarly as trustees have moved out to London’s suburbs and wider commuter belt, some of them have met other Nigerians residing in these neighbourhoods, a few of whom have

joined DIFN as supporters and, in one case, as a trustee and through this have been fully incorporated into the friendship network underpinning the organisation.

In these ways, DIFN has come to be highly valued by its original founders as a means of maintaining and expanding their friendships with fellow UK-based Nigerians, especially as they have little involvement with any other diaspora organisations and now that they find themselves living in neighbourhoods in which there are very few of their fellow diasporans. Indeed, although the trustees all enjoy great friendships with many non-Nigerians, the opportunity to socialise with friends of Nigerian origin appears to be particularly cherished. Ultimately, while DIFN's trustees undoubtedly share a deep commitment to contribute to the development of Nigeria, it is clear that they are also driven and bound together by a desire to share a diasporic space of friendship and conviviality through which can feel at 'home' while 'abroad'.

This desire for companionship, sociability and belonging is also important in driving and sustaining associations of diasporic professionals. Like geo-ethnic associations and diaspora NGOs, these professional groups tend to emerge out of, and often reflect a desire to consolidate and expand, pre-existing friendship networks. In the case of the Engineering Forum of Nigerians (EFN), for example, the association was established in 2002 by a small group of UK-based Nigerian engineer friends, most of whom had known each other since studying together at university in Nigeria and/or the UK during the 1980s. While a desire to contribute to 'home' was undoubtedly the principal imperative in the formation of EFN, the founding friends also wanted a means through which to continue and extend their relations of conviviality and companionship in the face of growing personal and professional responsibilities. As one of the original founders explains:

[...B]ecause we were friends, [...], it was just a natural evolution.. [...W]e all knew each other so we'd meet, we'd play football, we'd play cricket, we'd chat, we'd party, [...] and then as time moved on everybody was now becoming a bit older and possibly even wiser, we reached a stage I think in our careers where, [...], a lot of us got ourselves into senior positions, [...]. [...S]o we met one day and we decided, "look, let's get together one day and talk about what we want to do" and that's what we did. We determined to meet every month at that stage, [...] and those who knew others in the profession invited them to these meetings as well, [...] and that's how it began. (Interview, Lagos, September 2005)

Having emerged out of a network of friends and a series of informal social gatherings to be formally constituted in 2003, EFN has remained true to the imperatives of conviviality and companionship. Its headline annual 'Spring Event', the first of which was held in 2004, not only involves a seminar on an important engineering topic, usually related to development in Nigeria, but also culminates in an evening reception and dinner at which much highly congenial 'networking' ensues amongst old friends and new acquaintances. Furthermore, EFN organises group outings to locations of engineering interest, attending not only to member's professional curiosities but also their yearnings for sociability. In a similarly social vein, the Britain Nigeria Law Forum (BNLF) complements its periodic seminars on legal issues of particular relevance to Nigeria and Nigerian practitioners with monthly informal 'networking events' at a central London wine bar. Like the Medical Association of Nigerian Specialists and General Practitioners in the UK (MANSAG), the BNLF also embraces the spirit of conviviality by holding an annual gala ball. The Nigerian Nurses Charitable Association even goes as far as stating a formal aim to "entertain members" ([www.nncauk.org/aims.htm](http://www.nncauk.org/aims.htm)). Members certainly enthuse about the NNCA's "social events", noting that these occasions are not only fundraising events for the organisation's work at 'home' and 'abroad' but also "great fun" (NNCA member, interview, London, May 2005). Indeed, members of diasporic professional associations make it clear that while desires to develop in diaspora and contribute to 'home' are critical in drawing them to these groups, their participation also owes much to a strong desire to enjoy the companionship, conviviality and sense of belonging that is generated in the company of old and new friends who share not only a profession but also a 'home'.

**"They're one and the same thing": developing and belonging in diaspora and contributing to the progress of 'home'**

It is clear that desires to foster mutual support and progress, to preserve, promote and pass on cultural heritage, to enjoy companionship and conviviality and, ultimately, to feel at 'home' while 'abroad' are critical in the creation and maintenance of diasporic associational life. Together these key desires can be seen to constitute a yearning for a diasporic space in which to develop and belong 'abroad'. It is this overarching yearning that very often appears to be the most immediate and important imperative bringing diasporans together to form and sustain organisations. Therefore, it is by attending to

their own needs and desires for development and belonging 'abroad' that diasporans create and maintain the organisations that enable them to contribute to development at 'home'. Furthermore, we have also seen that by attending to the yearning for a diasporic space of development and belonging 'abroad', diaspora organisations not only attract the participation and resources that sustain them and make them in any way capable of contributing to the progress of 'home' but also build the individual transnational capabilities of their diasporic members, participants, and beneficiaries.

Consequently, the foundational concern with creating a supportive and convivial 'home from home' is rarely seen to contradict or conflict with any ultimate desire to contribute to the development of 'home' itself. Indeed, these two key objectives are generally considered to be entirely compatible and, moreover, inextricably linked. This is most clearly reflected in the way that diaspora organisations and their members tend to articulate as one unified imperative the yearning to create a space of development and belonging in diaspora and the desire to contribute collectively to the progress of 'home'. For example, the first constitutional objective of the Ukpewha Women's Association UK (UWA) is, "To cater for the welfare and well-being of Ukpewha women, and their families, living in the United Kingdom and in Nigeria" (UWA constitution). Similarly, one of the formal aims of the Bayelsa State Union is to, "Promote the economic and social development of Bayelsa State and its people in Great Britain and Ireland" ([www.bayelsa.org.uk/toplinks/about-us/](http://www.bayelsa.org.uk/toplinks/about-us/)). The diaspora NGO Nigerian Women for Development is "for the welfare of Nigerians in Nigeria and in the UK" (Organisation document, 2005) while the "mission" of the Nigerian Community Forum, another diaspora NGO, is "to tackle social and economic deprivation facing our Nation and people both Home and Away" (Organisation document, n.d.). As an organisation of diasporic professionals, the Nigerian Nurses Charitable Association also articulates its desire to support progress within the diaspora and its yearning to contribute to development at 'home' as a singular, coherent objective, stating that one of its key aims is, "To make vital contributions to health promotion in our community in the United Kingdom and Nigeria" ([www.nncauk.org/aims.htm](http://www.nncauk.org/aims.htm)).

While diaspora organisations generally seek to pursue a unified mission to support development in diaspora *and* at 'home', they are not always able to do so initially. Indeed, before attaining the desired balance and unity between their progressive desires at 'home' and 'abroad', many diaspora organisations first find it necessary to prioritise

the imperative to construct a supportive and convivial social space in diaspora. For instance, the Ozubulu Women Association (OWA), founded in 1998, claims, “Initially, the objective of the founding members was to create a social forum at which the women could discuss mutual cultural and ethnic issues. However, in 2002, there was a consensus among the members that there was a pull towards helping local Ozubulu indigenes in Nigeria” (OWA leaflet, n.d.). Similarly, an executive of the Ayege National Progress Union (ANPU), London, asserts of the association:

[...]he origin of it was to initially act as a kind of social gathering [...], and then, [...], that led to how we could assist Ayege back home. So it was just to help ourselves where we needed help, either financially or information-wise or any other way, and gradually the focus shifted to how we could actually assist with the hometown itself and let it progress further and further. (Interview, London, June 2005)

In this way, pursuing a yearning to contribute collectively to the ‘upliftment’ of ‘home’ is seen to depend on, and flow from, first attending to diasporic needs and desires for development and belonging ‘abroad’. As a founding member of ANPU London contends, “We just want to find a way of helping ourselves here, [...], we just want to know each other so that we’re very close, then how can we help our people back home” (Interview, London, April 2006). Concordantly, Mrs Ibrune of the Ukpemwa Women’s Association UK (UWA) enthuses of the organisation:

[...]It’s just for that togetherness [...], it’s for us to talk and laugh and then see what we can do for our people back home [...]. [...] The objective is knowing ourselves in this country, you know, those who want to belong, we know ourself, we know what is going on, if anybody has any need, we help out as much as we can, financially, emotionally and otherwise, and so we see what we can do for each other and also not only in this country but back home as well because we have a lot of things going on just to better ourselves and to better people back home also. (Interview, London, April 2005)

For organised diasporans, then, supporting each other, maintaining and celebrating a shared cultural identity, and enjoying companionship and conviviality become inherent to attempting to contribute collectively to the development of ‘home’. As Mrs Ubule of the UWA insists, “We socialise here to contribute to Ukpemwa” (Interview, London, April 2006). Concurring with this sentiment, the president of an Egba-Yoruba ‘hometown association’ asserts, “[...]In knowing each other, we contribute to our town” (Interview, London, May 2005). Like these stalwarts of geo-ethnic associational life, the

founders and members of diaspora NGOs and professional associations also tend to see the creation of spaces of development and belonging ‘abroad’ as fundamental to the making of collective transnational interventions at ‘home’. Indeed, we have seen that by building-on and facilitating cooperation, companionship, and conviviality in diaspora, these organisations are routinely seen not only to attract support for their own transnational activities but also to develop the individual capabilities of their members, participants, and service-users to contribute to ‘home’. This is why the founder of the diaspora NGO Nigerian Women for Development sees her organisation’s work to counter socio-economic exclusion among Nigerians in the UK as intrinsic to its efforts to “empower” ‘grassroots’ women in Nigeria (Interview, London, June 2005). “They are one and the same thing”, she contends, adding, “It is only when we support each other here that we are able to help back at home”.

### **Engaging diaspora organisations and supporting the development of ‘home’: the need to recognise the importance of developing and belonging ‘abroad’**

Recognising that the creation of a diasporic space of development and belonging ‘abroad’ is inherent to the making of collective transnational interventions at ‘home’ is clearly crucial in comprehending what drives, binds and sustains diaspora organisations and makes them in any way capable of contributing to the development of ‘home’. Furthermore, recognising this is also crucial if states and international agencies are to engage diaspora organisations in ways that are supportive and help realise their potential to make progressive interventions at ‘home’. Indeed, there is some evidence that such engagements can be constrained and even undermined by the apparent failure of potential ‘partners’ to understand and recognise that creating a space of development and belonging ‘abroad’ is inherent to diasporic associational life and its capacity to contribute to the development of ‘home’.

For example, while many diaspora organisations believe that registering with the UK Charity Commission would increase significantly their chances of obtaining external funding for transnational interventions at ‘home’, they are often reluctant to do so believing that the regulatory body’s rules would prohibit them from directing funds towards the socio-cultural and welfare activities that underpin their existence in the UK and make them in any way capable of contributing to ‘home’. A senior member of the

Ukpenwa Women's Association UK, who has many years experience of working in the UK not-for-profit sector, typifies such concerns:

[...W]hen you are registered you are restricted, [...]. If we register and we want to buy something for the organisation or give money, for instance, if anybody dies, in our constitution we have to pay to family, mother, father, give them money, but if you register I don't think you can do that, [...]. [Currently,] we are free to utilise funding like that but there is a limitation to what you can do if you register. I think that's why we didn't want to register. If it's somebody's birthday we give a card, if a child is born we organise, we go there and we give them money. So those are the kind of things we do for the people around here and therefore we are using our money to look after, somehow, the welfare of the people in England; to me, I think its good, but you can't do it anymore if you're registered. (Interview, London, April 2006)

Indeed, some diaspora organisations that have put aside such concerns and attempted to go ahead with registering as a UK charity have had their applications rejected because they were deemed to be primarily concerned with socio-cultural activities and the welfare of the their members. For instance, a founding member of an association of diasporic professionals recalls that the organisation was at first denied registered status because its activities were judged to be "social rather than charitable", the Charity Commission apparently highlighting the group's practice of supporting members in the wake of a birth or bereavement and its holding of social events (Interview, London, May 2005). "But social events aren't just social", she protests, adding indignantly, "Social events are fundraising events – that's how we generate our funds to be used for charitable purposes!"

While her association succeeded with a second application having "adjusted" its objectives to make them "more charitable", this acceptance came at the cost of removing from its constitution formal provision for the socio-cultural and welfare activities orientated towards members. Such 'adjustments' can, indeed, undermine the appeal of diaspora organisations and thereby diminish their transnational capabilities. For example, the president of a 'hometown association' argues that a key reason why the organisation has been unable to expand its active membership beyond the three founding nuclear families is because it has registered as a UK charity and can therefore no longer make enforceable, constitutional provision for the socio-cultural activities and welfare benefits that he believes would attract and hold new members. Indeed,



contending that registering as a charity undermines the “mutual support” on which African diaspora organisations “are based”, an executive of an umbrella association for such groups in the UK insists, “If they stop doing what they’ve always done, their memberships will lose interest and the associations will fall apart” (Interview, London, October 2004). Certainly, the evidence suggests that the state and international bodies will be able to engage constructively with diaspora organisations only when they recognise that creating a space of development and belonging ‘abroad’ is fundamental to the emergence and sustainability of diasporic associational life and its capacity to contribute to development at ‘home’.

## **Conclusion**

We have seen that a desire for a social space through which to develop and belong ‘abroad’ is a key imperative in the creation and maintenance of diasporic associational life. Indeed, this yearning for a supportive and convivial ‘home from home’ very often appears to be the most immediate and important imperative bringing diasporans together to form and sustain organisations (see also Sassen-Koob 1979; Okamura 1983; Schoeneberg 1985; Basch 1987; Rex et al 1987; Cheetham 1988; Rex 1991; Ireland 1994; Soysal 1994; Peil 1995; Attah-Poku 1996; AFFORD 1998; Danese 1998; Goldring 1998; Minghuan 1998; Landolt et al 1999; Liu 1998; Minghuan 1998; Popkin 1999; Adeyanju 2000; Kerlin 2000; Ndofo-Tah 2000; Owusu 2000; McLeod et al 2001). Consequently, it is in pursuing their own desires for personal development and belonging ‘abroad’ that diasporans forge and maintain the organisations that enable them to pursue any ultimate desire they might have to contribute collectively to development at ‘home’. Furthermore, we have also seen that by attending to the yearning for a diasporic arena of development and belonging ‘abroad’, diaspora organisations not only attract the participation and resources that make them in any way capable of contributing to the progress of ‘home’ but also build the individual transnational capabilities of their diasporic members, participants, and beneficiaries.

In these ways, then, coming together to develop and belong ‘abroad’ becomes inherent to any attempt to contribute collectively to the development of ‘home’. Consequently, any move to understand or engage constructively with diaspora organisations and their progressive potential for development at ‘home’ cannot view these groups simply as vehicles for transnational intervention and attend only to their border-spanning visions

and activities. Comprehending and embracing diaspora organisations as agents of development at 'home' relies on recognising that these groups come into being and accrue progressive transnational capacity and potential only through their attempts to create spaces of development and belonging 'abroad'. National and globalising discourses of diaspora and development might therefore do well to broaden their conception of what elements of diasporic associational life contribute to, and count as, development at 'home'.

## **11. Homeward bound: towards a conclusion**

### **Introduction**

This concluding chapter opens by reviewing the main empirical findings of the thesis. This review is organised around the five parts into which the thesis is divided and sets my research findings in the context of the existing literature, pointing to areas in which they challenge and contribute to the body of work on diaspora and development. Continuing to reflect on the existing literature, the chapter then moves on to draw out six key contentions made in the thesis. In so doing, the chapter also highlights some limitations of the thesis and the most important areas that I believe would benefit from further research and policy attention. My aim in this is to point to new directions I feel it is necessary for research and policy to take in order to better understand and support the contributions that diasporans and their organisations make to the development of ‘home’.

### **A review of the thesis**

#### ***Part 1: constructing and questioning collective transnational power***

Burgeoning globally since the turn of the new millennium, celebratory discourses of diaspora and development have imbued international migrants and their descendants with the capacity to transform from afar their communities and countries of ‘origin’ (Hermele 1997; AFFORD 1998, 2000; Portes et al 1999; Taylor 1999; Vertovec 2001, 2003; Al-Ali and Koser 2002; Mohan 2002, 2006, 2008; Mohan and Zack-Williams 2002; Zack-Williams and Mohan 2002; Bracking 2003; Gammeltoft 2003; Henry and Mohan 2003; Newland 2003; Sørensen et al 2003a; Van Hear and Sørensen 2003; Black et al 2004; COMPAS 2004a,b; de Boeck 2004; HCIDC 2004; IOM 2004a,b; Kapur 2004; Newland with Patrick 2004; USAID 2004; GCIM 2005; Farrant et al 2006; Ionescu 2006; UN 2006; World Bank 2006; Davies 2007; DFID 2007; Merz et al 2007; de Haas 2009). As we saw in Chapter 2, these discourses have radically reinterpreted the impact of household remittances and embraced notions of diaspora and migrant transnationalism to highlight a multitude of border-spanning practices, linkages, and flows through which overseas ‘nationals’ connect with ‘home’ and carry “enormous

potential” for its development (de Boeck 2004: 3). Exemplifying such thinking, Newland (2003: 3) argues, “[...T]ransnational networks are today the most important developmental resource associated with international migration”.

In highlighting the development potential of overseas nationals and their border-spanning networks, these discourses have drawn particular attention to diaspora organisations, lauding them as powerful and positive actors in the progress of ‘home’. As Faist (2008: 22) notes, “[...T]ransnational networks and associations of migrants have come to stand at the centre of the optimistic visions of national and international economic development policy establishments”. Consequently, diaspora organisations have been presented as ‘new’ agents of development that should be engaged and supported by states and international agencies interested in pursuing more direct and participatory modes of development assistance (Levitt 1997; Danese 1998; AFFORD 1998; Kerlin 2000; Orozco 2003, 2004; DFID 2001, 2007; Vertovec 2003; HCIDC 2004; Newland with Patrick 2004; Orozco and Lapointe 2004; USAID 2004; GCIM 2005; Hernandez-Coss and Bun 2007; Ionescu 2006; UN 2006; Orozco and Rouse 2007; Mercer et al 2008; Østergaard-Nielsen 2009; Mazzucato and Kabki 2009). This positioning of diaspora organisations has emphasised how these groups send monetary and material ‘collective remittances’, transfer innovative and progressive knowledge, ideas, and practices (termed ‘social remittances’), and engage in ‘political transnationalism’ through which they utilise the strategic space of diaspora to influence ‘host’ and ‘home’ governments to attend to the progress of their ‘home’ communities and countries (ibid; Levitt 1998, 2001; Itzigsohn 2000; Kerlin 2000; Ndofo-Tah 2000; Orozco 2000; Portes 2001, 2009; IOM 2004a,b; Orozco and Welle 2004; Cordero-Guzmán 2005; Babcock 2006; Caglar 2006; Mohan 2006, 2008; Cano and Délano 2007; Newland 2007; Portes et al 2007; Dumont 2008; Fox and Bada 2008; Itzigsohn and Villacrés 2008; Kleist 2008; Mazzucato 2008; McGregor 2009; Østergaard-Nielsen 2009).

However, it was also argued in Chapter 2 that this celebration of diaspora organisations is grounded in a rather limited empirical evidence base. For example, Portes et al (2007: 277) contends that the study of “immigrant transnational organizations” is “still in its infancy” and a 2004 report on diaspora organisations claims that “their structure, strategies and influences on local and national development are only minimally understood” (COMPAS 2004a). Indeed, studies of migrant transnationalism rarely focus

substantively on the organisations formed by migrants and their descendents and when they do address these groups, analytical attention tends to extend little beyond the particular organisational form of the 'hometown association' (see for example, Portes and Landolt 2000; Vertovec 2003; Newland with Patrick 2004; USAID 2004). Furthermore, as a number of authors have also noted, work on migrant transnationalism that does include diaspora organisations has been conducted largely in the particular context of Latin American and Caribbean migration to the USA (Al-Ali and Koser 2002; Smith 2002; Caglar 2006). In contrast, this thesis has concentrated on the little researched context of Nigerian migration to the UK and has focussed substantively on diaspora organisations, attending not only to hometown associations but also to other organisational forms such as issue-based NGOs and professional groups.

In so doing, this thesis has been centrally concerned with subjecting to greater empirical assessment the powerful and progressive role ascribed to diaspora organisations in celebratory discourses of diaspora and development. Drawing on the increasingly established concept and practice of 'multi-sited ethnography' (Marcus 1995), this assessment has been undertaken through a two-ended study conducted with Nigerian diaspora organisations in London and their sites of collective transnational intervention in Nigeria. As detailed in Chapter 3, the first stage of this research was a scoping study to identify, engage, and profile as many London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations as possible. Using diverse channels, 367 such groups were identified, including 236 geo-ethnic organisations (such as hometown, clan, state, and ethno-national associations), 64 issue-based NGOs, 24 Nigerian national associations, 17 professional associations, 11 religious associations, 8 alumni associations, 4 sports clubs, and 3 student unions.

Contact was made with 63 of these groups and basic data was collected about each through various combinations of informal dialogue, semi-structured interview, questionnaire survey, participant observation, and documentary analysis. Five organisations were then selected as case-studies for the deeper ethnographic engagement that constituted stage two of the research. This involved in-depth semi-structured interviews with five members of each case-study organisation, participant observation at the organisations' meetings and events, and analysis of organisational documents. In the third and final stage of the research upon which this thesis is based, the empirical focus moved to the sites in Nigeria where the case-study organisations

intervene. Here, ethnographic and archival methods were employed to explore from the perspective of 'home' the effects, reception and meaning of collective transnational contribution.

## ***Part 2: entanglements of power – diaspora organisations and the transnational politics of identity and development***

Building on this empirical foundation, it was argued in Chapters 4 and 5 that London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations are entangled in a transnational politics of socio-economic status, gender, and belonging in ways that could be considered highly problematic in terms of the progressive role expected of them in globalising discourses of diaspora and development. One of the most important development virtues ascribed to diaspora organisations in these discourses is that they direct their collective remittances to the poor and to public goods, such as schools and hospitals, and, in so doing, tackle inequality and disadvantage at 'home' (AFFORD 1998; Danese 1998; Kerlin 2000; Ndofo-Tah 2000; Orozco 2000, 2002, 2003, 2004; Sørensen et al 2003b; Vertovec 2003; HCIDC 2004; Orozco with Lapointe 2004; Orozco and Welle 2004; USAID 2004; GCIM 2005; Babcock 2006; UN 2006; Cano and Délano 2007; DFID 2007; Orozco and Rouse 2007; Portes et al 2007; Faist 2008; Fox and Bada 2008; Mazzucato 2008; Mercer et al 2008; Mazzucato and Kabki 2009; Portes 2009).

Organised diasporans engaged in this study undoubtedly harbour heart-felt desires grounded in personal experience and extended family bonds to reach, benefit, and 'empower' 'the grassroots' at 'home', especially 'the poor' and 'disadvantaged'. However, the collective transnational interventions they make often appear to do more to recognise, respect, and potentially reinforce established power hierarchies and local elite individuals and institutions. Indeed, while London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations often direct their transnational contributions to the needy and to public goods such as schools and hospitals, they often also make interventions that seem to attend primarily to the interests and aspirations of local elites. We saw, for example, how diaspora organisations grounded in geo-ethnic identities tend to channel their transnational benevolence to and through the 'traditional authorities' of their ancestral homelands, making donations to the construction, maintenance, and improvement of prominent symbols of traditional power, such as palaces and 'customary' courts, and directing money and materials intended for the public good through community

development committees that can appear to be most concerned with benefitting the elites who run them (see for example: Ahanotu 1982; Muoghalu 1986; Adejunmobi 1990; Barkan et al 1991; Vaughan 1995, 2000; Osaghae 1994, 1995; Honey and Okafor 1998; Trager 1998; Ikelegbe 2001a; Abbott 2002; Ukiwo 2003, 2005)

Similarly, in contrast to work that imbues collective transnational intervention with a propensity to contest and transform prevailing, patriarchal gender norms (Levitt 1997, 1998; Burton 2004; Gammage 2004; Osirim 2008; Landolt and Goldring 2009), it was argued that London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations, like migrant associations discussed elsewhere (Joly 1987; AFFORD 1998; Liu 1998; Mahler 1998; Popkin 1999; Uduku 2000; Jazeel 2006), appear to do more to reinforce than to challenge the established, and what might be seen as rather patriarchal, gender roles and relations of 'home'. And with especially serious potential consequences for the progress of 'home', it was asserted that rather than supporting the entrenchment of liberal democratic institutions and governance as globalising discourses of diaspora and development might hope (Levitt 1997, 1998; Obasanjo 2000; HCIDC 2004; Newland with Patrick 2004; Orozco and Welle 2004; USAID 2004; UN 2006; DFID 2007; Faist 2008), these groups can reproduce the discourses and practices underpinning an insidious and deeply divisive politics of belonging that is widely seen to fundamentally undermine the ability of the Nigerian state to fulfil its obligations to its citizens (see for example, Nnoli 1978, 1995; Joseph 1987; Diamond 1988; Bach 1997; Osaghae 1998, 2003; Jega 2000; Vaughan 2000, 2001; Igwara 2001; Obi 2001; Suberu 2001; Ukiwo 2003, 2005; Adejunmobi 2004, 2005; Isumonah 2004; Watts 2004a,b; Kraxberger 2004a,b, 2005; Obadare 2005; Ikelegbe 2005b; ICG 2006; Ukeje and Adebaniwi 2008). Indeed, we saw that in the ways they mobilise identity abroad and intervene transnationally at 'home', London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations often respond to and recreate a thoroughly destabilising and profoundly dangerous system of ethnicised competition for power and resources within the Nigerian polity. This would appear to lend at least some weight to fears often marginalized in globalising discourses of diaspora and development that overseas nationals can produce divisive, potentially destructive effects at 'home' (Anderson 1998; Collier 2000; Van Hear and Sørensen 2003; NIC 2004; Adamson 2006).

However, we saw that London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations can also work to soften and transcend the ethnicised boundaries of belonging to articulate and pursue

visions of Nigeria's national development. Similarly, it was argued that some of their collective transnational interventions do appear to reach, benefit and even empower 'the grassroots' in relatively direct ways and that even the 'traditional authorities' and elite-led community development committees through which some diaspora organisations intervene can be in touch with, and to some extent obligated to fulfil, the needs and desires of 'the people'. Furthermore, it was asserted that by reproducing established gender roles and relations, diaspora organisations are seen to maintain gender conventions that are, regardless of how patriarchal they might appear, widely considered both in diaspora and at 'home' to be entirely progressive, having long enabled women to assume public positions of status and influence as 'dynamic' organisers and 'mothers' not only of their families but also of their communities and the wider nation (see also Afigbo 1972; Okonjo 1976; Mba 1982; Amadiume 1987, 2000; Denzer 1994; Imam 1997; Olukoshi 1997; Enemuo and Momoh 1999; Pereira 2000; Ibeanu 2001; Ukeje 2004; Chuku 2005, 2009; Ikelegbe 2005a; Nolte 2008; Johnson-Odim 2009). It was argued, therefore, that through the transnational politics of gender, socio-economic status, and belonging, London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations are entwined in the progress of 'home' in ways that are much more complex and ambivalent than tends to be assumed in globalising discourses of diaspora and development.

### ***Part 3: collective transnational power and its limits***

It was asserted in Chapters 6 and 7 that in addition to being connected to the development of 'home' in ways that are much more ambivalent than discourses of diaspora and development might hope, London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations also appear to be considerably less powerful agents of transformation than these discourses generally suggest (Levitt 1997, 1998; Orozco 2000, 2002, 2003, 2004; Newland 2003; Vertovec 2003; HCIDC 2004; IOM 2004a; Newland and Patrick 2004; Orozco with Lapointe 2004; Orozco and Welle 2004; USAID 2004; GCIM 2005; Farrant et al 2006; Ionescu 2006; UN 2006; World Bank 2006; DFID 2007). Far from driving progress in a 'home' environment that is somehow dependent on collective transnational intervention (the scenario suggested in some of the most celebratory accounts of diaspora and development – see for example Portes and Landolt (2000); Orozco and Rouse (2007); Portes et al (2007)), these groups are overwhelmingly seen to have a relatively limited and ultimately rather marginal role in the development of



'home'. While diaspora organisations often send collective remittances to public institutions such as schools, hospitals, and community development committees, these monetary and material contributions are consistently seen to pale into relative insignificance compared to those made by individuals and organisations based within Nigeria itself. For example, we saw that, on average, Omoyege diaspora organisations based overseas contribute less than 11% of the total amount raised at the annual Ayege Day fundraising event, the vast bulk of the benevolence generated each year coming from donors based in Ayege itself or other locations within Nigeria.

Similarly, while London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations attempt to utilise the strategic space of diaspora to lobby the UK and Nigerian governments on issues deemed critical to the development of communities of origin and Nigeria in general, the influence they exert through this political transnationalism appears to be negligible. These groups certainly do not appear to wield the sort of influence on local and/or national affairs that would be expected of them in globalising discourses of diaspora and development (Vertovec 1999a, 2001, 2003; Itzigsohn 2000; Kerlin 2000; Levitt 2001; Portes 2001; Guarnizo et al 2003; Newland 2003; Van Hear and Sørensen 2003; HCIDC 2004; Kalinde 2004; Newland with Patrick 2004; Orozco and Welle 2004; USAID 2004; Cordero-Guzmán 2005; GCIM 2005; UN 2006; Cano and Délano 2007; Portes et al 2007; Dumont 2008; Fox and Bada 2008; Gamlen 2008; Itzigsohn and Villacrés 2008; Østergaard-Nielsen 2009). Indeed, we saw that at the community level, it is individuals and organisations based within Nigeria that are considered to be by far and away the most effective agents for encouraging the state to attend to local needs and aspirations. And at the national level, we saw that even the Nigerian state's tentative opening of a transnational sphere of engagement has afforded little space for the organised diaspora to voice its interests and desires and wield political influence that might in some way change the futures of local communities and the wider nation.

Furthermore, it was also argued that despite the celebration of collective transnational intervention as a key channel for the transfer of 'social remittances' (Levitt 1998; Vertovec 2003; HCIDC 2004; Orozco and Welle 2004; USAID 2004; GCIM 2005; Taylor et al 2006; UN 2006; Newland 2007; Fox and Bada 2008; Portes 2009), there are significant limits to the extent to which London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations can be seen to transfer 'home' new and developmentally-beneficial knowledge, ideas, and practices. Community-based diaspora organisations are not noted for remitting to

their ancestral homelands novel ways of thinking and doing development and it is individuals and organisations based within Nigeria that are lauded as the key sources of local innovation. Similarly, the useful knowledges and healthy behaviours promoted by many diaspora NGOs and the high-level expertise offered by diasporic professional associations are not necessarily as innovative in the context of 'home' as globalising discourses of diaspora and development might assume (ibid). Indeed, local NGOs have led, and continue to lead, the promotion of community development and healthy living and 'home'-based professionals already appear to be endowed with much, if not most, of the knowledge and skills supposedly promised by their diasporic counterparts.

#### ***Part 4: constraining collective transnational power***

In attempting to account for the relatively limited and ultimately rather marginal role of London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations in the development of 'home', Chapters 8 and 9 explored the key factors that are seen to constrain the ability and desire of these groups to intervene transnationally and fulfil the expectations not only of discourses of diaspora and development but also of their members and potential beneficiaries in Nigeria. It was found that the vitality and transnational capabilities of diaspora organisations are consistently seen to be severely undermined by a lack of funds and limited levels of active participation. Indeed, it was argued that diaspora organisations tend to depend heavily on the time and modest resources of a few, and sometimes just one or two, committed members. We saw that this problem of mobilising money and members is routinely and most readily traced by diasporic respondents to the difficulties of settling and progressing in diaspora. The challenges of obtaining legal settlement, facing discrimination and racism, and, relatedly, securing well-paid work with sociable hours, mean that many diasporans are seen to have neither the time nor the money to actively participate in or support diaspora organisations, greatly constraining the ability of these groups to contribute to 'home' (see also de Hann 1999; Al-Ali et al 2001b; Mohan and Zack-Williams 2002; Sørensen et al 2003b; McGregor 2009).

However, we also saw that for many in diaspora and especially at 'home', the limits to diasporic mobilisation are a product not only of the difficulties of developing in diaspora but also of an increasingly individualistic and self-indulgent diasporic disposition. Posited as either a product of diasporic exposure to 'Western' individualism or a reflection of the social atomisation created by political and economic crisis at

'home', this disposition is seen to undermine 'traditional' systems of obligation to extended family and wider community, limiting the desire of diasporans to come together for the benefit of 'home'. It was also argued that the transnational capabilities of London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations are further, and often critically, undermined by a distinct lack of transnational trust. With corruption, fraud, and clientalism widely seen to be rife in Nigerian society, we saw that there is a prevailing suspicion among diasporans that the organisations formed by their fellow overseas nationals are little more than vehicles for the personal enrichment and political gain of those who form and run them, further discouraging many diasporans from joining and supporting these groups (see also Guarnizo et al 1999).

Moreover, it was asserted that this culture of mistrust also exists between diaspora and 'home'. Indeed, we saw that organised diasporans are generally very wary of engaging 'home'-based institutions, individuals, and even relatives to act as local intermediaries for fear that they are likely to misappropriate any collective transnational benevolence that is directed through them. This means that many diaspora organisations decide not to engage a local intermediary and even those that do tend to establish a relationship that is rather tentative, limited, and fragile. In both of these situations, the ability of diaspora organisations to operate at 'home' is severely constrained, as is the possibility of these groups exerting influence over, or transferring social remittances to, 'home'-based individuals and institutions.

It was also demonstrated that the desire and ability of diasporans to come together for the benefit of 'home' is further constrained by the absence of an 'enabling environment' at 'home'. Indeed, it was argued that a worrying lack of security and a frustratingly uneven and unreliable transport and communications infrastructure are routinely seen to create a thoroughly disabling environment at 'home', deterring and disrupting the flows of people, information, money, and materials upon which collective transnational intervention relies. The collective transfer of high-level professional expertise is widely seen to be particularly undermined by woefully inadequate technical facilities and a pervasive culture of unprofessionalism manifested most blatantly in the corrupt practices of the so-called and seemingly intractable 'Nigerian system'. Furthermore, there is little confidence that the Nigerian state has the desire or the ability to mitigate these major challenges to collective transnational intervention. Moreover, we saw that the Nigerian state is itself often regarded as a barrier to diasporic contribution, being

widely accused of placing unnecessary and often corrupt bureaucracy in the way of the initiatives of organised diasporans and even of having a tendency to respond with unwarranted repression and violence when it feels its authority is being challenged. It was argued that this points to how 'home' is routinely considered to be an environment that is often more hostile than enabling, with not only the state but also local communities and the professions having the potential to obstruct, resist, and undermine collective transnational intervention.

### ***Part 5: the power of belonging – developing 'home' here and there***

However much globalising discourses of diaspora and development might laud diaspora organisations for the contributions they make to development at 'home', we saw in Chapter 10 that these groups should not be viewed simply as vehicles for collective transnational intervention, valued and engaged only for the money, materials, ideas, and influence that they transmit to their communities and countries of origin. For those who form and sustain London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations, these groups mean and represent much more than this. Indeed, we saw that these organisations are forged first and often foremost as social arenas through which diasporans can support one another, maintain and celebrate a shared cultural identity, and, often most important of all, develop friendships, socialise, relax, and have fun. From this perspective, it was argued, diaspora organisations are primarily supportive and convivial socio-cultural spaces through which members and participants can pursue their own settlement, progress, fulfilment, and happiness in diaspora and feel at 'home' while 'abroad'. Consequently, globalising discourses of diaspora and development would do well to revisit some of the earlier work on migrant adaption, integration, and transnationalism which gives much greater attention to the socio-economic and cultural importance of diaspora organisations in the 'host' context (see for example, Sassen-Koob 1979; Okamura 1983; Schoeneberg 1985; Basch 1987; Rex et al 1987; Cheetham 1988; Rex 1991; Ireland 1994; Soysal 1994; Peil 1995; Attah-Poku 1996; AFFORD 1998; Danese 1998; Goldring 1998; Liu 1998; Minghuan 1998; Landolt et al 1999; Popkin 1999; Adeyanju 2000; Kerlin 2000; Ndofor-Tah 2000; Owusu 2000; McLeod et al 2001).

Furthermore, it was argued that this foundational concern with coming together to develop and belong in diaspora is rarely seen to contradict or conflict with any desire to contribute collectively to 'home'. Indeed, we saw that these two key imperatives are

generally considered to be entirely compatible and, moreover, inextricably linked; diasporic respondents often emphasise that it is only by organising in an attempt to meet their own needs and aspirations for development and belonging 'abroad' that they are able to mobilise resources for the development of 'home'. In this way, creating a 'home' in diaspora becomes central to the attempt to re-make 'home' in Nigeria. And as I will go on to suggest later in this conclusion, the effort to re-make 'home' in Nigeria extends far beyond the kinds of largely material and intellectual development that are generally imagined in globalising discourses of diaspora and development. Just like the creation of a 'home from home' in diaspora, the making of 'home' in Nigeria involves much more than maintaining schools and hospitals, constructing town halls and palaces, enlightening and empowering communities, transferring high-level expertise, and supporting democracy and good governance; at its heart, and underlying all of this, is a desire to create a place in which one can settle, progress, celebrate a shared cultural identity, socialise, relax, and have fun, a place in which one can develop and belong.

### **Key contentions, limitations, and future directions**

Building on the main empirical findings outlined above, I now want to draw from the thesis six key contentions. In so doing, I also wish to highlight some limitations of the thesis and some areas that would benefit from further research and policy attention, pointing to new directions that I believe it is necessary to take to better understand and engage the role of diasporans and their organisations in the development of 'home'.

#### ***1) It is important to recognise and engage with the diversity of the organised diaspora.***

As we saw in Chapter 2, research that has addressed diaspora organisations and their transnational linkages with 'home' has focussed overwhelmingly on the particular organisational form of the 'hometown association' or 'HTA'. The HTA is undeniably a key mode of organising in diaspora. Indeed, of the 367 London-based Nigerian organisations I identified, 92 (25%) were HTAs, making them the most numerous type of diaspora organisation in this study. However, this study also identified three other important types of geo-ethnic diaspora organisation, based respectively on the generally wider geo-ethnic formations of the 'clan' or ethnic 'sub-group' (41, 11%), 'ethnic-nationality' (60, 16%), and state of origin within the Federal Republic of Nigeria (43, 12%). While these other wider forms of geo-ethnic organisation were addressed in the

thesis, both of the case-study geo-ethnic organisations represent geo-ethnic formations that are strongly centred around a particular town or city.

I believe it is necessary to give greater attention to diaspora organisations grounded in wider geo-ethnic identities such as 'ethnic nationalities' and 'states' as the data I was able to collect about such groups in this study suggests that the nature and focus of their activities can be rather different from those of HTAs, with potentially important implications for mobilising resources in diaspora and intervening in development at 'home'. Diaspora organisations grounded in 'bigger' geo-ethnic identities have the potential to muster diasporic constituencies that are often considerably larger than those of HTAs. However, with their ancestral homelands often covering hundreds if not thousands of square miles, including many towns and often cities, and containing hundreds of thousands if not millions of fellow 'indigenes', these groups tend to lack a convenient point of intervention in Nigeria. The problem of satisfying all of the more parochial interests in these large geo-ethnic formations means that these groups tend to avoid making the sort of highly focussed material donations to local schools and hospitals associated with HTAs.

In their attempt to contribute to 'home', these wider groups tend to confine themselves to the more diffuse and explicitly political role of attempting to represent and further from afar the wider geo-ethnic interest. This kind of high-level political transnationalism is often seen to be of primary interest to only the most politically ambitious diasporans and of less immediate interest to the wider majority, who, if they have any sub-national geo-ethnic interest at all, are generally seen to be most concerned with the progress of their particular hometowns. Consequently, diaspora organisations grounded in wider geo-ethnic identities tend to attract narrower and less committed membership bases than HTAs, especially outside of elections and other moments of especially heightened political intrigue or crisis in Nigeria. However, those who dominate and sustain these groups are often seen to be highly active and committed and as having, or as working hard to create, influential connections at home. Furthermore, the substantial geo-ethnic power blocs that these groups embody represent the axes around which much of the major state- and national-level, and potentially most destructive, politics of belonging revolves in Nigeria, as was suggested by the case of the Urhobo Progress Union in Chapter 5. However, it is the constructive engagement and negotiation of such blocks upon which much of Nigeria's future progress depends.

It is therefore essential to know more about the nature and operation of diaspora organisations grounded in the wider geo-ethnic identities around which development unfolds in Nigeria and many other countries in Africa and the wider world.

Beyond 'HTAs' and geo-ethnic diaspora organisations in general, this study also identified seven other key forms of organisation employed by London-based Nigerians. The selection of five case-study organisations included the two most numerous of these alternative organisational forms, namely the issue-based NGO and the professional association. In so doing, this research demonstrated the value of extending analytical attention beyond HTAs. Both of these organisational forms represent popular alternative modes of diasporic mobilisation which are not explicitly grounded in, or connected to, localised geo-ethnic identities and institutions at 'home' and it was shown that this has much significance for the articulation and pursuit of national visions of Nigerian belonging and development. Furthermore, there were indications that the way in which issue-based NGOs organise and operate transnationally, especially through a deeply embedded local individual, might facilitate more direct and potentially empowering engagements with 'grassroots' communities at 'home'. I suggest that there would be much value in conducting equally detailed research with the five other key forms of alternative London-based Nigerian diaspora organisation identified in this study, namely Nigerian national associations, religious associations, alumni associations, sports clubs, and student unions. A deeper analysis of these modes of diasporic mobilisation is likely to reveal further ways in which development and belonging at 'home' are imagined and pursued from afar. Furthermore, this study found that examples of some of these other groups are constituted as gender specific organisations. Any future research should be cognisant of this as we saw that women's branches of geo-ethnic organisations are widely seen to embody alternative transnational aspirations and capacities.

In better understanding the nature and implications of the diverse ways in which diasporans mobilise for the benefit of 'home', another key task for future research is to extend debates about diaspora and development to include work on religious transnationalism. It was clear throughout this research that the mosques and churches formed by Nigerians in London are fundamental elements of their diasporic lives, constituting key spaces for developing and belonging 'abroad' and for forging transnational connections with 'home'. Indeed, some respondents were keen to

emphasise that these diasporic religious institutions are far more important to them than any diaspora organisations in which they are involved. While there has been some insightful work on Nigerian religious life in London and the UK (Hunt and Lightly 2001; Harris 2006; Burgess 2009), this work has said little about any role that Nigerian churches and mosques in this country might have in development at 'home'. With work on diaspora and development having in turn said little about the role of religious transnationalism, there is a pressing need to fill this research gap, especially in contexts, such as the Nigerian example, where religion and its institutions are widely recognised to be of particular significance in individual lives and national progress.

***2) Diaspora organisations do not necessarily contribute to development at 'home' to the extent, or in the ways, imagined in globalising discourses of diaspora and development. However, this is not a reason to dismiss these groups as transnational agents of progress and as potential development partners.***

As detailed in Part 3 of this thesis, London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations do not appear to produce developmental effects at 'home' of the magnitude that might be expected in globalising discourses of diaspora and development. While these groups tend to make generally welcome and often much appreciated contributions to public goods such as schools, hospitals, and community development initiatives, they certainly do not drive progress in a homeland that has somehow become dependent on their transnational benevolence, contrary to situations described in work on other transnational contexts (see for example, Levitt 1997, 1998; Orozco 2000, 2002, 2003, 2004; Portes and Landolt 2000; Newland 2003; Vertovec 2003; Newland with Patrick 2004; Orozco with Lapointe 2004; Orozco and Welle 2004; Orozco and Rouse 2007; Portes et al 2007). Indeed, we have seen that these organisations appear to have a relatively limited, rather marginal role in the development of 'home'. We have also seen that one of the main reasons advanced for this is that London-based Nigerian organisations and their transnational aspirations tend to suffer from a severe, often crippling lack of funds. The much mooted idea that governments and international agencies should award matching funding to diaspora organisations might therefore do much to heighten the transnational contributions that these groups are able to make to development at 'home'.



However, it has been also been argued in this thesis that London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations relate to development at 'home' in ways that are highly problematic in terms of the progressive role constructed for them in globalising discourses of diaspora and development. Indeed, we have seen that rather than supporting liberal, democratic institutions and governance these groups can contribute to the reproduction of an insidious and deeply divisive politics of belonging at 'home' that is widely argued to fundamentally undermine the Nigerian nation-building project. Furthermore, we have also seen that London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations can do more to reinforce than reconfigure established socio-economic and gender hierarchies, cementing 'the grassroots' and 'women' in their apparently disadvantaged positions rather than empowering them as might be hoped. Consequently, it might be argued that dispensing matching funding to heighten the transnational capabilities of these groups could in practice produce effects deemed detrimental to development at 'home'.

Yet we have also seen that London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations can reach, benefit and potentially empower poor and disadvantaged people at 'home' as well as maintain gender roles and relations that are widely seen both in diaspora and Nigeria as entirely progressive, having long enabled women to attain public positions of power and influence. Furthermore, we have seen that these groups, even those grounded in supposedly exclusive and particularistic geo-ethnic identities, can articulate and pursue national visions of belonging and development, signalling heart-felt desires for a united and prosperous Nigeria. So while London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations may well connect with development at 'home' in ways that might be considered rather problematic from the perspective of globalising discourses of diaspora and development, it is clear that they can also make thoroughly progressive transnational contributions, certainly as far as many in diaspora and at 'home' are concerned. If governments and international agencies have a real interest in engaging and supporting diaspora organisations in any meaningful way, they will need to be open to the alternative ways in which organised diasporans and their potential beneficiaries at 'home' might imagine and pursue development (see also Mercer et al 2008 and Mohan 2008). However, this all depends on discourses and policies of diaspora and development being created in genuine dialogue with the organised diaspora and its intended targets at 'home', something that I will argue below has yet to be achieved, and is much needed, in the case of London-based Nigerian organisations.

***3) It is important to recognise the significance of local agency and the internal diaspora in the development of 'home'.***

In their rush to highlight the transformative role of diasporans and their organisations, globalising discourses of diaspora and development can tend to give the impression that these transnational actors are somehow the only, or at least the major, agents of progress at 'home'. In this way, local agency is elided and 'home' becomes little more than a passive site of intervention waiting patiently, almost helplessly, for the transnational benevolence of the diaspora to spark development. However, we have seen in this thesis that 'home' is far from an inert environment deeply dependent on diasporic contribution. Indeed, it has been shown that it is in fact local actors who are by far and away the main drivers of, and contributors to, development at 'home'. Whether as 'traditional rulers', leaders of community development committees, communal benefactors, members of social clubs, women's groups, youth organisations, or trade associations, NGO founders or workers, or health, education or other professionals, local actors are seen both at 'home' and in diaspora as overwhelmingly the most important sources of money, materials, influence, ideas, expertise, and endeavour in the development of 'home'.

Clearly, if the global rise of discourses of diaspora and development is not to obscure the key drivers of progress in 'home' environments, it is necessary to reassert and give far greater recognition to local agency. While it might appear much easier to identify and engage diasporic actors, located as they often are in major centres of global power and supposedly imbued with hegemonic notions of development, any attempt to connect with and support the progress of 'home' cannot bypass local actors. Furthermore, we have seen that even in terms of simply heightening the contribution of diasporans and their organisations, it is still vital to recognise the role of local actors. Examples such as that of the London-based diaspora NGO Development Impact for Nigeria and its local programme-coordinator, Pastor Bode Omokaro, show that collective transnational intervention is not only greatly facilitated, but also profoundly enhanced, by the engagement, enterprise, and expertise of 'home'-based intermediaries. And it has also been shown that collective transnational intervention can be questioned, resisted, and ultimately undermined by local actors, particularly when they feel interventions are made without their consultation and with little account of their needs, interests, and

aspirations. As we have seen in the case of interventions made by diasporic professionals and their organisations, local hostility can be especially strong when transnational contributions are seen to bypass and devalue local agency and expertise. Local actors are clearly absolutely central to the success or failure of collective transnational intervention and they must therefore be consulted and fully engaged in any attempt by governments and international agencies to heighten the individual and collective contributions of overseas diasporans to 'home'. After all, it will only be when diasporic desires are brought into closer conversation with the aspirations of 'home' that it will be possible to achieve meaningful and transformative transnational cooperation.

Furthermore, at the community level, we have seen that the diasporic actors that most augment local agency in the development of 'home' are based not overseas but rather in the 'internal diaspora' within Nigeria. Considered as much 'abroad' or 'in diaspora' as their co-ethnics based overseas, it is 'indigenes' who have migrated beyond the community to other towns and cities in Nigeria who are consistently identified as by far and away the most important individual and collective diasporic contributors to progress at 'home'. It would therefore seem necessary to give much greater recognition to the developmental contribution of 'internal diasporas' in better understanding the role of mobility in development. Indeed, one of the most important contributions discourses of diaspora and development could make is to do far more to highlight the transformative actors, linkages, and effects associated with internal migration. Certainly, as some recent, more critical accounts of diaspora and development have suggested (Bakewell 2008b; Mercer et al 2008; Skeldon 2008), it would seem essential that a broader conceptual framework is advanced that integrates analyses of both internal and international processes of migration in the wider project of identifying, understanding, and engaging the key drivers of change in 'home' environments.

***4) It is essential to recognise the importance of development in diaspora in the development of 'home'.***

This thesis has shown that the capacity of London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations to intervene transnationally and contribute to the development of 'home' is widely seen to be heavily constrained by the challenges diasporans face in settling and progressing in the UK. Indeed, we have seen that the difficulties of developing in diaspora are consistently posited as underlying two of the greatest constraints on the

vitality and transnational capabilities of diaspora organisations, namely, an often crippling lack of funds and limited levels of active participation. It is routinely argued that the challenges of obtaining legal settlement, overcoming discrimination and racism and, relatedly, securing well-paid work with sociable hours, mean that many, if not most, diasporans have neither the time nor the money to actively participate in, or contribute to, diasporic associational life and any collective transnational interventions organised through it.

Consequently, a key contention of this thesis is that any policy interventions aimed at heightening the contribution of diasporans and their organisations to development at 'home' need to make a priority of attending to the challenges of development *in* diaspora. While there is undoubtedly much potential in directly engaging and supporting the transnational interventions of diaspora organisations with programmes such as matching funding, there may be as much if not more potential in pursuing with renewed vigour policies designed to foster a society in which migrants and their descendents have far greater opportunities to advance and prosper. Indeed, we have seen in this thesis that when diasporans are able to achieve notable socio-economic progress, they are much more likely and able to create, join, and sustain diaspora organisations and collective transnational contributions to 'home'. It would therefore seem that the more established and successful diasporans can become, the greater their capacity to come together and mobilise resources for the benefit of 'home'.

Consequently, discourses of diaspora and development should do more to re-emphasise and address what this and other research clearly suggest are still critical issues of migrant integration and minority inclusion (de Hann 1999; Al-Ali et al 2001b; Mohan and Zack-Williams 2002; Sørensen et al 2003b; McGregor 2009). One way in which this could be undertaken is to afford greater recognition and support to diaspora organisations for the important and much cherished work that they do to ease the settlement and heighten the long-term 'comfort' and progress of their members and beneficiaries. Ultimately, it is only when diasporans have the opportunity to fulfil their potential 'abroad' that they will be able to fulfil their potential to contribute to development at 'home'. A central principle of any policy of diaspora and development has to be that development there is inseparable from development here.

***5) Development at 'home' is as much a prerequisite as an outcome of collective diasporic contribution.***

It is clear in this thesis that the lack of an 'enabling environment' at 'home' is widely considered to be a major constraint on collective transnational intervention. We have seen that diasporic contributions are discouraged and often severely disrupted by what are generally seen as Nigeria's worrying security situation, woefully inadequate telecommunication, transport, and technical infrastructures, and its corrupt, inept, and often repressive state. With collective transnational intervention so often foundering in the face of such fundamental development challenges, it is hard to imagine that it is possible for diasporic effort alone to engender and entrench major progress at 'home'. As Skeldon (2008: 13) argues of the 'home' environment in one of the more critical explorations of diaspora and development that have recently begun to emerge, "The underlying structures need first to be in place in order for the agency of migrants to function".

As much as collective transnational intervention can undoubtedly make contributions to development at 'home', any possibility of it producing decisive and durable transformations clearly depends on some notable progress having already been made towards creating an 'enabling environment' at 'home'. This puts the onus on governments and international agencies to refocus on the task of tackling directly any major structural factors at 'home' that undermine not only effective diasporic intervention but also development in general. Certainly, 'home'-states and their development 'partners' should not use the individual and collective contributions of diasporans as an excuse to step back from their responsibilities and undertakings to address the most pressing problems involved in devising and realising progress. As even one of the most enthusiastic proponents of the transformative potential of diaspora declares:

*A laissez-faire approach that merely waits for the market to work its 'magic' through spontaneous remittances and knowledge transfers will not work. Governments must meet their half of the bargain because, in the absence of suitable conditions that only they can create, the best-intentioned transnational projects cannot succeed. (Portes 2009: 17)*

***6) It is essential to recognise and engage the power of belonging.***

It has been argued in this thesis that central to the creation and maintenance of diasporic associational life is a yearning to develop and belong in diaspora. Indeed, we have seen that London-based Nigerians tend to be brought and held together in organisations first and often foremost by a desire to establish and sustain relations of mutual support and progress, to preserve and celebrate a shared cultural heritage, and, often most important of all, to socialise, relax and have fun in a space in which one can feel at ‘home’ while ‘abroad’. Significantly, it has been asserted that this foundational concern with creating a supportive and convivial socio-cultural realm in diaspora is overwhelmingly seen as fundamental to building the capacity to contribute collectively to the development at ‘home’; it is only by coming together in an attempt to meet their own needs and desires ‘abroad’ that diasporans are able to mobilise the necessary social, cultural, economic, and political capital to make collective transnational interventions.

Consequently, a key contention of this thesis is that any policy intervention aimed at heightening the transnational capabilities of diaspora organisations needs to recognise, respect, and possibly even support associational activities undertaken in the ‘host’ environment, such as the extension of financial support to members and the holding of social and cultural events. As these activities are fundamental to the vitality and transnational capacity of diaspora organisations, the policy environment should certainly not discourage them as the UK Charity Commission appears to do in the case of London-based Nigerian diaspora organisations (see Chapter 10). If governments and international agencies are to help diaspora organisations fulfil their transnational potential, they will have to expand their conception of what elements of diasporic associational life count as, and contribute to, development at ‘home’. In so doing, policy makers should consider supporting the socio-cultural activities of diaspora organisations as an effective way of furthering progress at ‘home’.

Furthermore, there were clear indications in this research that the key imperative to develop and belong ‘abroad’ is greatly augmented by an ultimate desire to develop and belong at ‘home’. Constituting what I believe is one of the most important areas for further research in the wider project of better understanding diasporic associational life and its connections to development at ‘home’, there was a strong sense that the overriding imperative bringing many London-based Nigerians together to form

organisations and intervene transnationally is a desire to accrue status and create socio-economic opportunities at 'home' in order to be able and welcome to return more often and possibly even begin to (re)settle there. While most first generation London-based Nigerians engaged in this study have remained in the UK much longer than they ever imagined they would, the vast majority remain deeply attached to the dream of returning to live for extended periods, or more or less permanently, in Nigeria. Significantly, many respondents who have enjoyed some notable socio-economic success in the UK have already begun to take more frequent and longer trips to Nigeria to make investments and arrangements for a more permanent return. A particularly common aspiration is to create a situation in which it is possible and comfortable to spend at least half a year each year at 'home'. Furthermore, with age, many second-generation respondents contend they have developed a growing interest in visiting Nigeria more often and even working and/or investing there. Such diasporic desires for visits and return(s) tend to be strongly linked to a sense that despite all the infrastructural limitations, threats to life and property, and the uncertain political and economic situation, life at 'home' would simply be much more enjoyable and satisfying than it is in the UK; the sense of cultural 'comfort' and affinity and the contentment of feeling that one would be contributing directly to the progress of one's own community and country is imagined and, often felt, to be irresistible.

Significantly, initiating and supporting collective transnational intervention is widely seen to play a key role in pursuing these aspirations to enjoy development and belonging at 'home'. Often drawing on a host of 'traditional' adages that implore migrant 'indigenes' to remember, benefit, and finally return to their ancestral homeland, respondents tend to express a very strong sense of obligation to contribute to their community and country of origin and stress that they would be unlikely to be welcomed and respected by family, kin, and community members should they attempt to return without having been seen to have made some effort to fulfil this obligation. Recognised as a key way in which those 'abroad' can signal and pursue a desire to fulfil their obligations to 'home', active support of collective transnational intervention is seen an important step towards being (re)accepted upon visits or more permanent returns. Certainly, respondents in Nigeria, particularly influential community elites, claim that diasporic visitors and returnees are much more likely to be afforded hospitality and assistance with important arrangements, such as securing access to land, if they are known to have engaged in collective contribution to 'home'. And beyond local elites, no

matter how little tangible impact collective transnational intervention may appear to have, its symbolic value to ordinary people, who often take great heart from not having been 'forgotten' by their co-nationals overseas, should not be underestimated.

Moreover, especially notable participation in collective transnational intervention can sometimes win not only basic acceptance, respect, and assistance at 'home' but also special recognition and, through this, exceptional opportunities to (re)establish and progress at 'home' (some of the earlier work on 'migrant transnationalism' is particularly instructive here; see for example, Okamura (1983); Basch (1987); Levitt (1997); Liu (1998); Guarnizo et al (1999); Landolt et al (1999); Popkin (1999)). At the community level, some diasporans have been bestowed with honorary chieftaincy titles for their support of collective contributions to 'home', allowing them greater access to 'traditional' hierarchies of power (see also Fisiy and Goheen (1998)). And at the state and national level, some diasporans have come to the attention of government through their committed participation in collective transnational intervention and have consequently been offered senior political and professional positions.

It is knowing that active involvement in collective transnational intervention has the potential to create such recognition and opportunity at 'home' that many London-based Nigerians appear to be especially keen to establish and join diaspora organisations. While the immediate imperative is to belong and develop in diaspora, the ultimate aspiration is to belong and develop at 'home'. This relationship between participation in diasporic associational life and the desire to (re)make a 'home' to which one can return, prosper, and enjoy respect, fulfilment, and 'comfort' deserves much deeper empirical exploration and must be recognised and supported in discourses of diaspora and development. Any unease on the part of policy makers that this relationship signals the kind of diasporic self-interest that might run contrary to wider development objectives should be placed aside; the relationship between collective transnational intervention and the personal aspirations of diasporans to develop and belong in their communities and countries of origin likely reveals just how much organised diasporans are invested in the development of 'home'.



## **“They pay lip service”<sup>1</sup>: From celebratory discourses of diaspora and development to meaningful engagement – a final thought**

The global proliferation of celebratory discourses of diaspora and development has done much to draw attention to the transformative potential diasporans and their organisations can contribute to the development of ‘home’. However, it has been argued in this thesis that there is much more for these discourses to recognise and engage with in attempting to understand and heighten the role of diaspora organisations in supporting positive change in communities and countries of origin. Firstly, the diversity of ways in which diasporans organise in an attempt to meet their needs and desires in diaspora and at ‘home’. Secondly, the alternative ways in which the organised diaspora and its potential beneficiaries at ‘home’ might imagine and pursue progress. Thirdly, the importance of local agency and the internal diaspora in driving and contributing to development at ‘home’. Fourthly, the challenges diasporans face in attempting to develop ‘abroad’. Fifthly, that development at ‘home’ is as much a prerequisite as an outcome of collective diasporic contribution. And lastly, the power of belonging in bringing and binding diasporans together in their effort to support development in diaspora and at ‘home’.

Critically, recognising and engaging all of this requires states and international agencies to enter into genuine and meaningful dialogue with the organised diaspora as a whole as well as its potential beneficiaries at ‘home’. Currently, and despite the best efforts of the organised diaspora to make itself known, hegemonic discourses of diaspora and development appear to be a long way off entering into such a dialogue even with the overseas nationals they do so much to celebrate. For example, while the UK Department for International Development has begun to consult ‘the Nigerian diaspora’ in initiatives such as its country development plan for Nigeria and the Commission for Africa, these consultations have taken place principally through the UK-branch of Nigerians in Diaspora Organisation Europe (NIDOE), the Nigerian government-initiated umbrella body that this and other research suggests has precious little connection to, and even less trust and respect among, the wider population of UK-based Nigerians (de Haas 2006). Consequently, the discourses of diaspora and development constructed by states and international agencies have passed the vast majority of organised diasporans by,

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<sup>1</sup> Diaspora NGO trustee, interview, London, July 2006.

leaving them no closer to participating in the 'mainstream' policy debates and initiatives undertaken in and around their communities and countries of origin. As a stalwart of the Ayege National Progress Union, London, remarks with no little frustration:

[...W]hat's his name, the Live Aid guy, Geldof, I mean Bob Geldof. I know he's doing a lot of, you know, he's breaking his neck for Africa and everything, but so am I. But I just don't have a voice that can be heard. (Interview, London, June 2005)

Until such voices are given a genuine opportunity to be heard, and are actually listened to, discourses of diaspora and development will have done little to understand and support the contributions made by diasporans and their organisations to the development of 'home'.

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